WILDERNESS BABIES

JULIA A. SCHWARTZ

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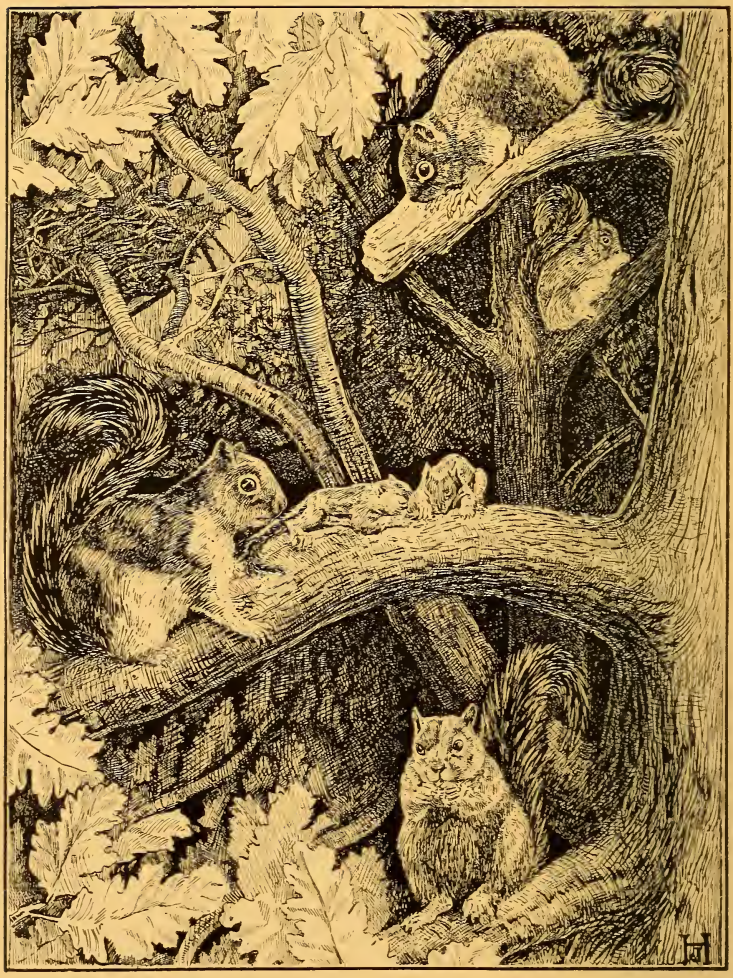
Wilderness Babies



THE SQUIRREL.

"They sat on the branches with their bushy tails curving over their backs." *Frontispiece.* *See page* 120.

Wilderness Babies

By
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CONTENTS

		Page
	Introduction	vii
I.	The One with a Pocket	1
II.	The One that Eats Grass in the Sea	17
III.	The Biggest One	27
IV.	The One that Lives in a Crowd	43
V.	One of the Fleetest	59
VI.	The Best Builder	73
VII.	The Timid One	93
VIII.	The One with the Prettiest Tail	109
IX.	One that Sleeps all Winter	123
X.	The Wisest One	137
XI.	The Fiercest One	151
XII.	The Best Hunter	165
XIII.	The One with the Finest Fur	179
XIV.	The Smallest One	193
XV.	The One that Digs the Best	203
XVI.	The One with Wings	215
	Conclusion	227

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

THE SQUIRREL

"They sat on the branches with their bushy tails curving over their backs" . . . . . *Frontispiece*

PAGE

THE OPOSSUM

"In a few minutes another and another baby followed the big brother and clung there on the mother's furry back" 5

THE MANATEE

"The old mother manatee held him close to her" . . 19

THE WHALE

"When the strangers came swimming toward him he hung back behind his mother" 36

THE BUFFALO

"The big brown mother buffalo was bending her shaggy head to lick his curly yellow coat" 45

THE ELK

"Grazing over the upland meadows" 64

THE BEAVER

"Across the pond to feed in the woods" 81

THE RABBIT

"It was pleasant there in the underbrush of the woods" 100

THE FOX

"Now and then the fox stopped to listen" 147

THE WOLF PAGE

"It was the father wolf coming in" 153

THE PANTHER

"They were safe there, even when the mother was away hunting" 169

THE FUR SEAL

"At first they only rolled and tumbled about the beach" 184

THE SHREW

"Such mites of babies as they were" 196

THE MOLE

"The greedy young ones shoved and pushed and fought as if they were starving" 206

THE BAT

"His mother was flying so fast that it made him dizzy" 219

INTRODUCTION

I. *When the earth was new.*

MILLIONS and millions of years ago all this solid earth on which we live was only a wavy, quivering mass of glowing gases. It was a vast ring of vapor flung from the great blazing sun. Spinning off into space, it went rolling over and over as it whizzed and whirled in a curving path around and around the sun.

After a long, long time the gases began to cool on the outside. Little by little bits of rock formed here and there and floated together, till they made one crust spreading over the surface. It was a hot, rumpled crust. Inside of it the gases still boiled and glowed. Outside of it thick vapors were always rising into the sky and then falling again as rain. As soon as the rain fell sizzling on the hot crust it was changed back to vapor, and sent up into the sky as clouds, to fall again as rain.

So this boiling, steaming ball kept on whizzing and whirling and sizzling as it went spinning around the sun. Thunder was roaring; lightning was flashing; and rain was always spattering down and sizzling up again.

But naturally the crust cooled a little every time the rain touched it. When many years had passed the crust was too cool to turn all the rain into vapor. Some of it stayed down as water. Then more rain fell, and more and more, till there was an ocean over the whole earth. The heat of the gases inside made the water outside bubble and steam, so that the air was always dark with thick vapors.

Time passed on. The crust cracked and crumpled up over the fiery mass within. Mountains were pushed up like great wrinkles of rock, and the ocean flowed deeper over the plains and through the valleys. Bare islands rose black and dripping above the waves. Here and there fire and smoke burst roaring from a volcano, and melted stones rolled hissing into the muddy warm water all around.

There lay the rocky land and tumbling ocean wrapped in the dark fog. Not a tree grew on the mountains; not a blade of grass showed green in the fields; not a living thing stirred on all that bare, hot, gloomy ball. It was the earth without life.

II. *How the living things came.*

Little by little the crust became thicker and the water became cooler. The clouds of vapor lifted and scattered far above, and the sunlight shone down through the hazy air. Sometimes there were dreadful storms of rain and thunder and lightning; sometimes the sky was pale blue, and the waves lapped softly against the rocky shores.

And after a while — a long, long while — something alive began to move in the water. These first tiny living things were not nearly so large as the point of a needle. They were as transparent as water, and they lived all the time in the water. Though they were so small they could move and eat and grow.

For thousands of years these were the only living things in all the world. They were like bits of jelly, without mouths or stomachs or

heads or feet. They fed on the specks of seaweed that began to grow in the water at that time.

Still the thousands and thousands of years slipped away. There began to be different kinds of animals. The bits of jelly-like creatures kept on eating and growing and making other animals like themselves. Some of them changed a little so that they had stomachs and mouths. That made them like tiny hollow bags, such as the coral animals and the sponge animals.

Then some of these developed bodies around their stomachs and became starfishes and sea-urchins. After years and years the living things changed and grew till there were many kinds. Some were worms, with heads but no legs. Some were crabs and lobsters, with legs and claws. There were spiders and insects on the land.

None of these earliest animals had bones inside their bodies, and so this age of the earth was the time of animals without backbones.

As time passed on here and there an animal with a backbone appeared swimming around in the water. They were the first fishes, and

breathed with gills instead of lungs. After them came frogs and toads, who breathed with gills while they were tadpoles and with lungs when they were grown up. Next, true air-breathing reptiles, such as snakes and crocodiles, were developed.

Then queer creatures that were half like reptiles and half like birds began to stalk about on the land, flapping their skinny wings. They had teeth and long bony tails. Presently real birds with beaks and feathers appeared flying from tree to tree.

Last of all, little furry animals like rats began to scurry to and fro in the woods. They were the first mammals in the world.

There was a great difference between these mammals and all the other animals. All the other kinds of babies began right away as soon as they were born to eat the same food that their parents did. But every mammal baby lived at first by drinking milk from its mother's breast.

III. *How the babies grow.*

All the tiny animals, like those that first lived in the ocean, eat and eat till they reach

a certain size. Then each one splits into two bits of jelly just exactly alike, and they both go sailing away to find more food. Nobody can tell which is the parent and which is the baby.

Baby corals sometimes hatch from eggs that come floating out of the old ones' mouths. Or sometimes they bud like flowers from the stem of the coral. They begin right away to eat whatever flows into their stomachs. The parent starfish lies on its back in the sand and bends up its five rays like a basket, to hold its eggs. When the babies come out away they drift through the sea and pick up their own food.

The old oyster packs its eggs in its gill-pockets, — thousands and thousands all in a sticky mass. They hatch out and swim off, flapping the three-cornered part of each tiny shell. They swallow the living specks of things in the water. The mother crab puts her eggs into a little sack and fastens it on her legs. Her babies scuttle away in a hurry and take care of themselves.

The baby worms crawl out of the eggs and begin to dig their own holes without stopping

to learn from anybody. Baby insects eat and eat whatever is nearest when they hatch out. They look like worms at first. When it is time for them to change they curl up in tight little cases of skin, and grow like the parent insects, with legs and wings and heads. Baby spiders stay near their mothers for a while and learn to catch flies to suck.

The mother fish drops her eggs in the water or lays them in some small nest. As soon as they are hatched the little ones go darting to and fro. They know what is good to eat without being taught how to find it. Frogs and toads lay their eggs in the water. When the tadpoles come out they live there like fishes till their legs grow long and their new lungs help them to breathe in the air. Then off they hop over the land to live by themselves.

Reptiles leave their eggs lying on the sand to be warmed into life by the sunshine. Many of the young ones know how to take care of themselves from the first. But sometimes a family of tiny new snakes stays creeping near the old one for a few days. Sometimes a mother crocodile follows her babies to the river

and drives away the enemies who may be waiting to eat them.

All these babies — the jellyfish, the corals, the oysters and the crabs, the worms, the frogs, the fishes, and most of the insects — can take care of themselves as soon as they are alive. The parents leave them alone to find their own food and live as best they can.

But baby birds are different. They are not cold-blooded, like these other animals. When they are hatched they have no feathers on their tiny bodies; and so they must be kept covered up for a time under the mothers' warm wings. They are too weak to hop away or try to find food, so the parent birds must feed them with worms and insects. When they grow strong enough they are taught to fly about and hunt their own food.

Baby mammals are even more helpless than baby birds. At first they cannot eat anything except the milk from their mothers' breasts. So of course if they were left alone they would starve to death right away. Even after they learn to eat other kinds of food they must be taught many things before they know how to take care of themselves.

IV. *All kinds of mammals.*

There are many different kinds of mammals, of many shapes and sizes and colors. There are all sorts of babies, from the tiny shrew-mouse, that can sleep in a thimble, to the big baby whale, twice as long as an ox. Some can swim like fishes; others can fly like birds. Some dig homes under the ground; others make their nests in hollow trees or caves. Some live in the mountains, and some on the plains. Some live in the woods, and some in the sea. Some eat grass, and others eat flesh. Some eat nuts, some eat fruit, and some eat anything they can find.

All these mammals are alike in having hair on some part of their bodies, in having teeth at some time in their lives, and in feeding the young with milk.

Many of them are alike in other ways. Rabbits and squirrels have the same kind of furry coat, the same shape of teeth, and they eat the same food. Sheep and cattle have the same kind of hoofs and horns. Wolves and foxes look almost exactly like each other.

Those mammals that are most alike are said to belong to the same group or order. For example, every animal with hoofs belongs to the *Order of Hoofed Mammals.* Every animal with four gnawing teeth in the front of its mouth belongs to the *Order of Gnawing Mammals.* Every animal that lives on flesh belongs to the *Order of Flesh-Eating Mammals.*

There are eleven of these groups, but the animals of North America belong to only eight of them. All the animals in the first group have pouches, or pockets, of their own skin, in which to carry the young. The opossum belongs to this *Order of Pouched Mammals.* When he is a baby he is carried around in his mother's furry pocket. Later he learns to hang by his feet and tail to a branch, while he eats fruit. At night he trots through the woods and roots for insects with his pointed nose.

The manatee belongs to the *Order of Sea-Cows.* Sea-cows are fish-like creatures that eat vegetable food in the sea or in rivers. The fat baby manatee lies in his mother's arms as she balances herself on the end of her tail in

the water. He learns to crawl about on the sandy bottom and munch water-plants.

The whale belongs to the *Order of Whales.* Though he lives in the deep ocean and looks like a monstrous fish he is really a mammal. He has warm blood and a few bristles for hair. The baby whale is fed on milk at first. When he grows older he is taught to catch and eat water-animals.

The wapiti, called the American elk, and the bison, called the American buffalo, belong to the *Order of Hoofed Four-Foots.* They eat grass and chew the cud. The story of an elk roaming over the mountains is almost the same as the story of any of the swift deer family. The life of a young buffalo in the herd is much like that of any of his cousins among horned cattle.

The beaver and the squirrel and the rabbit belong to the *Order of Gnawers.* The beaver cuts down trees with his strong teeth, and builds dams and houses of sticks. The squirrel scampers along the branches, and sits up to nibble nuts in the shadow of his own bushy tail. The rabbit scuttles over the ground from one hiding-place to another, in his daily search

for green grass and tender twigs to eat. Rats and mice are also Gnawers. Indeed, there are many more animals in this *Order* than in any of the others.

The bear and the wolf and the fox and the puma, called the American panther, belong to the *Order of Flesh-Eaters.* The furry seal is a flesh-eater that lives mostly in the water. They are all mighty hunters. The sharp-clawed puma, the swift wolf, the tricky fox, the strong-armed bear, and the lively seal, all have many long, cutting teeth to tear their prey to pieces.

The moles and shrews belong to the *Order of Insect-Eaters.* The little mole lives underground, and learns to dig with his shovel-like hands. When his pointed teeth grow out he chases worms up and down and around, and gobbles them as fast as he can. The tiny shrew-babies cuddle down in their bit of a nest under a stone and wait for the night before they peep cautiously out.

The bats belong to the *Order of Wing-Handed Mammals.* The baby bat is rocked to sleep in his mother's wings. He learns to fly in the dark and to hunt the swift insects

that hover above the roads and ponds. When winter is near he finds a gloomy cave. There he hangs, head downward, by the hooks on his claws, and sleeps till spring brings the warm weather again.

V. *The earth to-day.*

It is now countless years since the earth was new. It has changed from that bare, hot gloomy ball, covered with black rocks and muddy water, to a green, beautiful world. There are all kinds of living things in the ocean. In the forests insects hum above the flowers; birds fly from branch to branch; reptiles crawl beside the rivers. And everywhere — in the air and beneath the ground, on the land and under the water — live the mammals.

The opossum is the one with a pocket. The manatee is the only eater of grass in the sea. The whale is the biggest of all animals. The wapiti is the handsomest of the swift deer family. The bison is the hardiest four-footed creature in America. The beaver is the best builder. The squirrel has the prettiest tail. The rabbit is the most hunted by all its hungry enemies.

The bear is the surliest one. The wolf is the fiercest. The fox is the shrewdest. The puma is the best hunter. The seal has the finest coat. The mole can dig better and faster than any of the other mammals. The little shrew is the tiniest of all. The bat is the only one that flies with wings.

This book is to tell the stories of how these baby mammals grow and learn day by day to take care of themselves. In hollow trees or down under water among the lily-leaves, in the cool sea or on the rugged mountains, on the grassy plains or among the waving tree-tops, in the dark caves and burrows or hidden in the tangles underfoot, — all the world is alive with young creatures.

Bright eyes glitter and small paws patter, little noses sniff the air and sharp ears twitch. There is a rustling of leaves above and a crackling of twigs below, a splashing in the swamp and a silent bending of the grasses. In the sunshine or the rain, in the daytime or at night, life is busy everywhere on this beautiful old earth.

I

THE OPOSSUM

"THE ONE WITH A POCKET"

Wilderness Babies

THE ONE WITH A POCKET

FOR days and days the new baby opossums lay crowded close together in their mother's furry pocket. They slept and drank milk, and grew and grew till their eyes began to open. It was dark all around them, but up above their heads a faint gray line showed where light was stealing in over the edge of the pocket.

The biggest baby opossum looked and looked with his little bright eyes. He wanted to see more. So up he crawled, clambering over the soft, tiny bodies of the eleven other babies. Some of them wriggled and squirmed under his bare little feet. After slipping back once or twice he reached the edge and poked his pointed white snout outside.

He could not see anything because he was under his mother, and her long fur hung down over him. She was lying on a nest of grasses in a hollow tree. That was where she

stayed all day long when the sun was shining without. Every night at dusk she climbed down the rough trunk and went to hunt for something to eat.

When she felt the tiny claws of her baby clutching her fur she looked down between her fore-paws at the little mouse-like fellow. Then with her smooth pink hands she gently pushed him back into the pocket and closed the opening. He was not big enough yet to come out of the warm, dark nursery.

So for a week longer he cuddled down beside the others, while they all slept and drank more milk and grew stronger every hour. The biggest baby was so restless that he scrambled around and crowded the others. Once he caught hold of another's tail between the thumbs and fingers of his hind-feet, and pulled till the little one squeaked. His fore-feet were like tiny hands without any thumbs.

At last, one day, he saw the edge of the pocket open a crack. He was so glad that he climbed up as fast as he could scramble, and pushed outside. He held on to his mother's fur with all four feet. When she

THE OPOSSUM.

"In a few minutes another and another baby followed the big brother and clung there on the mother's furry back." *Page* 5.

reached down to smell him the bristles on her lips tickled his nose. Then he climbed around upon her back and twisted his tail about hers to hold him steady.

He looked like a mouse, with his long tail, his black ears erect, his bright eyes twinkling in his little white face, and his pointed nose sniffing at the strange odors in the hollow tree. It was much lighter there than inside the pocket. Higher up over his head there was a hole leading out of the hollow. Queer small shadows were dancing and flickering across the opening. He did not know that they were only green leaves.

In a few minutes another and another baby followed the big brother and clung there on the mother's furry back. It must have seemed a noisy place to them, for while in the pocket they had noticed only the softest muffled rustling and scratching of the old one's feet in the nest. Now they could hear a chirping and a squeaking and a rattling of branches. They crowded close together in fright at the scream of a blue jay, as it chased a chattering red squirrel through the tree-top. Then a sudden loud thump-thump-thump of a woodpecker

hammering on the bark outside sent them scuttling back to the safe nursery in a tumbling hurry.

After this the whole family climbed out every day to play about on the mother's back. The biggest baby liked to curl his small tail about her large one, and then swing off head downward. Sometimes he pushed the others down just for the fun of seeing them scramble up again, hand over hand, clutching the long fur.

Of course he was the first one to poke his head out every day. Once he woke from a nap in the pocket and started to climb outside. But he stopped half-way, hanging to the edge with both fore-feet. It was nearly evening, and the old mother opossum was clambering down the trunk to go hunting for her supper.

The baby held on tightly, while she trotted away through the woods. Now and then a leaf rustled or a stick cracked under her feet. Sleepy birds were twittering in their nests. The mother pricked her ears and listened, for she ate eggs and young birds whenever she could find them within reach. She had not

tasted an egg this spring, because she could not climb very nimbly with her pocket full of babies.

Presently she came to a swamp, and splash, splash, splash! the mud went flying. It spattered the baby's white face and made him sputter and cough. Then he heard the dreadful croaking of hundreds of frogs. In a terrible fright he slid back into the nursery to hide beside the others.

The old one was trying to catch a frog to eat. Now she jumped this way, and now she jumped that way. Such a jostling as the babies felt when she finally gave a great spring for a big green fellow sitting on a log. She caught him, too, but the jolt almost knocked the breath out of the twelve soft little bodies in her pocket.

On another evening the babies awoke to find themselves swinging to and fro in dizzying jerks. They rolled and tumbled from side to side. They bumped their heads and noses against one another. When the biggest baby tried to push his way out he found the edge of the pocket close shut. Though he scratched and squeaked the mother did not open it. She

was afraid that they would all fall to the ground, for there she was hanging upside-down by her tail to a branch of the tree.

Down below on the ground a big black bear was hugging the trunk and shaking it as hard as he could. He was trying to shake the old opossum off so that he might catch her and eat the whole family. But she held on so long that finally he became tired of waiting. So away he walked to find something else for supper. Then the mother swung down to the nest in the hollow and rested there while her babies played around her.

Every day the babies stayed outside the nursery for a longer time, though they were always ready to scurry back at the mother's first warning grunt. They kept growing bigger, till one night they found that they could not all crowd into the pocket. Then they huddled together on her back, with their tails twisted around hers.

In this way they rode through the woods when she went hunting. They watched with their bright eyes while she turned over rotting logs with her snout to catch the grubs underneath. Sometimes she rooted in the ground

for sprouting acorns, or nipped off mouthfuls of tender grass. Once she caught a young rabbit. Then how excited the little opossums were! And how they all squeaked and hissed together as they rode trotting home!

By this time they had cut their teeth, — fifty sharp little teeth in each hungry mouth. It was time for them to be weaned. When they tried to drink milk the mother pushed them away. Then she picked some sweet red berries, and taught the hungry babies how to eat them. They learned to chew the juicy roots that she dug in the fields.

The babies were greedy little things. When the old one caught a mouse or a mole or a toad, the young ones all rushed and snatched. Once the biggest baby gobbled up a beetle before the others could get a taste. They were so angry that they tried to bite his nose and ears. He squeaked, and ran as fast as he could to hide under the mother.

She was a good and patient mother. Of course, as long as they were small enough to stay in her pocket she carried them everywhere with her. Even when they grew as large as rats they rode on her back through

the woods. These twelve fat babies were so heavy that sometimes she staggered and stumbled under the load.

One night, when all the babies were trotting along on their own feet, they saw two gleaming red eyes in the dark thicket before them. Something round and furry snarled and sprang at them. They all ran under their mother as quick as a wink. She ruffled her long grayish hair above them. When the wildcat jumped at her she growled and hissed and scratched and bit furiously, till he ran limping away into the shadowy wilderness.

On another evening a big dog came galloping up before they could scramble into a tree. His red tongue was hanging out of his mouth between his white teeth. As soon as he caught sight of the opossums he made a dash to catch them. Instantly they all fell down and rolled over, just as if they were dead.

There they lay, with their eyes shut, their paws limber, their tails limp. They seemed to stop breathing. The dog smelled them and pushed them with his cold nose. But they kept perfectly still and did not move even an eyelash. They were pretending to be

dead. It was the one trick that they all knew without being taught.

The minute the dog walked away up they all jumped and scampered into a tree as fast as they could scurry. When the dog turned his head and saw them he ran back and leaped up to reach them. But all the opossums were safe enough now. While he was jumping and barking below they clung fast in the tree with their hand-like feet. They wound their tails about the branches above to hold more securely.

The little opossums learned to climb all sorts of trees, rough or smooth. It was easier to climb the rough trees because they could dig their nails farther into the bark. The biggest baby could walk along the springiest limb, even if it kept teetering up and down in the wind. When he felt like it he swung by his tail for the longest time without getting dizzy.

All summer long the twelve little opossums stayed with their mother. During the day they slept cuddled in the hollow tree. The old father opossum never came home, for the mother had driven him away before the babies were born. She wanted all the room in the nest

for them. She could take care of them better than he could, because she was bigger and knew how to fight her enemies more fiercely. Every night, after sunset, the mother and her twelve children set off on their hunting. Down through the woods to the marsh they trotted. There some waded into the mud to catch frogs, while others chased mud-turtles over the shore. Some hunted for berries and others nosed for acorns under the oaks.

It was beautiful there in the woods at night. When the stars twinkled overhead and the soft wind rustled in the tree-tops the little ones frisked and frolicked. They hid under the shadowy bushes or jumped hither and thither to snap at the fluttering moths. But on stormy evenings they plodded on in the rain, their wet fur drooping. With their noses close to the ground they hunted till they found a few mouthfuls to eat. Then back to the cosy hollow for a longer nap, after licking their pink hands clean and washing their white faces, just as kittens do.

One night, in autumn, the old mother opossum felt the nip of frost in the air. Then she knew that the persimmons were ready to be

eaten. Away through the woods she hurried, with the young ones trotting after her. Past the marsh and over the blackberry hills she led the way to a thicket of trees tangled with wild grapevines. There above on the branches the round little persimmons were shining yellow in the moonlight.

Up the trees eleven of the babies scrambled hungrily, and, hanging by their tails, stuffed the fruit into their wide mouths. Ah! but was n't it delicious! Better than anything they had ever tasted before in all their short lives! Then the biggest baby, who had stopped to gobble ripe grapes, heard them munching so greedily. One look sent him clambering after the others. He was sorry enough that he had wasted any time eating wild grapes.

Night after night, till the persimmons were gone, the opossums hurried away to the thicket, and ate and ate till they could eat no longer. They grew so fat that they puffed and panted when trotting home again in the gray light of frosty dawn.

As the weather grew colder the opossums roamed farther through the woods in search of food. Once in a while one of them found

a pawpaw-tree. Then from far and near opossums gathered under the low wide-spreading branches to feast on the banana-shaped fruit. That was the last good dinner that the little fellows had for many weeks.

Soon the ground was frozen hard over the juicy roots. All the fruit left in the woods hung wrinkled and frost-bitten. The worms and toads crawled into their holes for the winter. The beetles disappeared, and the spiders curled up in their hiding-places to sleep through the cold weather. Most of the birds flew away south.

One by one each little opossum wandered off by himself, and made a nest in a cosy hole or a snug hollow stump. There he drowsed away the days, and often slept through the nights without stirring out. Now and then one of them caught a mouse or dug up a frozen root to nibble. Sometimes they tore rotten logs apart to get at the torpid grubs within. The biggest baby found a heap of nuts hidden away under a stone by a thrifty chipmunk.

In the beginning of the winter the little opossums were so fat that they could live three or four weeks without eating or drinking.

When the cold winds blew, and the snow fell silently, they cuddled down in their warm nests and slept the time away. But many a night they woke up hungry. And every day their round furry bodies were a little thinner, till at last spring melted the snow and ice everywhere.

There was plenty to eat by that time, with all the green things growing. The little creatures of the woods and ponds were waking to new life. There were buds to nibble and beetles to catch. There was many a nest of birds' eggs, too, and broods of tender young field-mice squeaking in the grass. There were frogs croaking in the marsh, and berries were ripening in the fields.

The twelve little opossums were grown up now, and knew how to take care of themselves. Their mother had another family of babies in her furry pocket. Sometimes she met her other children roaming beside the marsh to catch frogs. One evening they saw, just as plain as anything, a little pointed nose and two twinkling bright eyes peeping over the edge of her pocket.

II

THE MANATEE

"THE ONE THAT EATS GRASS IN THE SEA"

THE MANATEE.

"The old mother manatee held him close to her." *Page* 19.

THE ONE THAT EATS GRASS IN THE SEA

DOWN among the lily-leaves, under the river, the baby manatee was being rocked to sleep on his mother's breast. He looked like a roly-poly fish, with a puffy dog-face. He was covered all over from his broad tail to his round head with thick and wrinkly gray skin. His tiny eyes were shut, and his flippers were folded together as he slept.

The old mother manatee held him close to her, bending her short flippers, which were really her arms. The fingers at the ends of her hands were so hidden under the skin that they looked as if covered with mittens. She was balancing herself on the end of her tail, and swaying gently to and fro in the water.

The baby's nap did not last very long. One of the annoying things about being a manatee and living under water was the trouble in breathing. Every two or three minutes the

mother flapped her tail and rose to the top of the river to breathe. That always woke the baby. He opened his eyes, blinking in the bright sunlight.

All around him the water sparkled and dimpled in the sunshine. Here and there dragon-flies glittered as they skimmed over the ripples. Butterflies were fluttering over the golden centres of the floating lilies. Graceful reeds bordered the shore. The juicy grass, that manatees love to eat, grew green, trailing underneath. Far up above it all the summer sky was blue.

The baby manatee did not seem to care for all these beautiful sights. Very likely he could not see well above water, and he did not enjoy the dry, warm feeling of the air. His sense of smell must have been too dull to notice the fragrance of the lilies or the spicy scent from the swamp. Creatures living under water do not use their noses much.

But the little manatee could hear the least soft plop of a leaf falling in the river. The sudden splash of a frog's jump made him squirm and twist in terror. He wriggled out of his mother's hold, and sank down, down,

down, with the bubbles eddying over his roly-poly body.

Of course he was not afraid, for he could swim as soon as he was born. He paddled with his tail and flapped with his flippers as he went swimming around over the clean white sand of the river-bottom. At first he could not steer very well, and so he bumped into the stems of the lily-plants and tangled his flippers among the roots of the reeds.

Through the pale green of the water all around him he caught sight of his father and big brother. They were creeping about on their flippers and tails, while they munched the weeds and grasses. When they stretched out their heads, toward a bite of something, each one grasped the food between two horny pads in the front of his jaw, tore it free, and then chewed it with his few grinding teeth in the back. Their faces looked like monstrous caterpillars sucking and chewing.

The baby champed his small jaws and sucked with his split upper lip as he watched. The sight of them eating made him so hungry that he wanted his mother to come and feed him with her milk. Manatees are mammals

that live in shallow water. Of all the animals in the sea and salt rivers manatees are the only ones that eat only grass and weeds. All other sea-mammals, and fishes, too, eat living creatures.

Sometimes the baby manatee had great fun in rolling over and over on the sand and pebbles at the bottom of the river. The old ones liked to scratch and clean their wrinkled skins by plunging and scraping over the gravel. It was easy enough for them to roll, because they were so round and had no legs to get in the way.

After the tumbling he followed the others as they went paddling to the top of the river. There he twitched apart his lip-lobes and blew, spouting up spray and water. Then, drawing in a long breath, he closed the stoppers in his nostrils and floated down to the sandy bottom to sleep or eat again.

All summer the manatees lived there in the pleasant river. On misty mornings sometimes they swam up to a mud flat, and crawled out to take a nap in the soft warm slime. Out in the air they could sleep and breathe at the same time, without waking up every few min-

utes. When the baby was tired of staying still he slid down the slippery bank — splash! — into the water.

His splashing sent a snake wriggling away through the swamp. The crabs on the sand below went scuttling wildly hither and thither to escape the flapping of his tail. Fishes darted out-stream, and mussels closed their shells to keep out the stirred-up gravel. The frogs sitting in the mud turned their round eyes to look at the funny little fellow with the wrinkled dark skin.

Away he paddled to the bottom and tried to munch the water-grasses. His few teeth were cutting through his gums by this time, and he was hungry for something besides milk. The green leaves tasted so salty and stringy that he did not like them at first. It was easier to suck warm, rich milk, without needing to chew and chew till his jaws really ached.

One night the manatees lay down on the clean sand, folded their flippers under them, and closed their eyes. They fell fast asleep. Now one and now another woke to swim to the top for a good long breath. About mid-

night the old mother suddenly felt a chill stealing through the water. She shivered all over, and hurried to wake the others. She knew that cold weather had come. If they did not take care they would all catch cold and die.

So away they started, as fast as they could paddle, down the river to the sea. Then south along the shore they travelled to find warmer waters. They kept so near land that they could hear the waves breaking on the beach. The ocean washed to and fro in swinging billows over their heads. When the baby lifted his head above the surface, bits of foam blew in his eyes from the curling crests of the waves.

Down below, where the old ones stopped to munch the seaweeds, he saw wonderful things. There were starfish floating along with their five rays spread out. There were transparent jellyfishes, with long threads streaming down from their quivering bodies. There were mussels swimming about in search of food. There were sponges growing on the rocks. There were trees of branching coral, each tiny coral animal waving the fringe around its open mouth.

Of course there were fishes — hundreds and hundreds of them — flashing everywhere. Once a fat porpoise came rolling and tumbling through the shallow water. He was a mammal, and belonged to the same group as the whales. When he was a baby he fed on milk, just in the same way as the little manatee and all other mammals.

On and on travelled the manatees toward the warm south seas, now swimming on swiftly, now stopping to munch the weeds. Sometimes they stood on the tips of their tails and nodded their heads as if bowing. Sometimes they folded their flippers under them to sleep, then woke to breathe, and fall asleep again.

After days and days they reached the southern river, where they were to spend the winter. There they found another family of manatees with a little one just the size of the baby. While the old ones munched the weeds, or dozed on the mud islands, the two youngest slid down the slippery banks and splashed and dived together. They took naps side by side. Sometimes they tried to balance themselves on their tails, as the old ones did.

This southern river was different from that one at home. The plants had broader leaves and larger flowers. The swamp was tangled and shadowy even at noonday. Strange animals tramped through the underbrush; monkeys swung on the branches, and brightly-colored birds flew overhead. Hairy spiders crawled over the ground, and big snakes wriggled into the water.

When spring came, away the manatees swam on their way back to the pleasant river, where the baby first opened his little eyes in the cool green nursery among the lily-leaves. Of course he never knew that some sailors once saw his mother rocking him to sleep at the top of the water. They thought that she was a mermaid with a baby in her arms.

III

THE WHALE

"THE BIGGEST ONE"

THE BIGGEST ONE

HE was the very biggest baby in all the world. He looked like a monstrous fish as he lay beside his mother in the middle of the bay. But he was not a fish. He breathed with lungs instead of gills. On his thick skin he had a few bristly hairs instead of scales such as fishes have. The blood rushing through the great veins in his body was warm instead of cold. And finally he was drinking milk in mighty gulps that sent gallons and gallons down his baby throat at every swallow. He was a whale, and belonged to the class of mammals.

The big body of the mother whale looked like a dark rounded island as she lay on her side almost out of water. She was the largest mother animal that ever lived. When she opened her enormous jaws her mouth seemed like a gloomy cave. Fastened along its floor was an immense cushiony white tongue as big as a feather-bed.

The baby whale himself was twice as long as an ox. His smooth skin glistened like

shiny leather when he heaved his back above the waves for an instant. Once in a while he flapped his forked tail or wriggled his front fins. Though his eyes were bigger than a cow's they looked very small while he lay, half asleep, rocking lazily to and fro in the swell of the sea.

The baby whale knew how to swim alone from the very first day. The earliest thing he remembered was the water lapping over his eyes and tickling in the tiny holes of his ears. On top of his head there were two blow-holes, or nostrils, closed with valves, to keep the water from trickling into his lungs.

When he rose to the top of the sea, to fill his lungs with air, away he swam, up and up, easily and lightly, through the pale-green water, toward the sunlight twinkling on the surface above. The mother whale swam beside him, almost touching him with her flippers. Her flippers were really her arms. When he was tired she helped him by holding him up.

As soon as his head pushed above the waves he opened the valves in the blow-holes and drew great breaths of sweet, fresh air deep

down into his lungs. How good it felt! Then arching his back, with a flourish of his tail down he dived after his mother. They sank swiftly into the cool depths, while the sea closed silently over their shining sides.

The baby whale did not go down very far. The air in his lungs buoyed him up. His bones were light and full of oil. Under his dark skin a layer of fat, called blubber, kept him floating, almost as if he were wearing a life-preserver wrapped around him.

The new air in his lungs grew warm and damp. After a few minutes he wanted to breathe again. So with a flap-flap-flap of his tail up he paddled. Puff, piff! out through the blow-holes rushed the warm air from his lungs. In the cold outside air it changed to spray, and went spouting up like a fountain. Down it came showering, with silver drops splashing and tinkling.

That must have been fun. The baby could not stay under water so long as his mother could. Often he left her swimming around over the rocky bottom of the bay while he paddled up to get a fresh breath. Sometimes

he was in such a hurry that he blew out before reaching the top. Then the water above him went spouting up, and sprinkling back noisily about his glistening head.

For days and days the baby whale lived there in the bay with his mother. It was the whole world to him, for he had seen no other place. Of course he did not know how it looked from above, with its blue, sparkling water, and its tall cliffs casting long shadows over the ripples at dawn.

To him the bay was a delightful playground. Its oozy floor was covered with rocks under the cool green water. Long fringes of seaweed floated deep down under there. In dark caves sponges and sea-lilies grew, and crabs scuttled backward into slimy crannies. There were big fishes and little fishes darting to and fro. At times they hung motionless, with glistening scales, their round eyes unwinking, their tails quivering now and then.

Every day, after the baby whale drank all the milk he wanted, he took a nap, lying beside his mother on the surface of the bay. Every day he grew a little bigger, and swam

a little faster, and stayed below a little longer without rising to breathe.

When he was old enough to stop drinking milk he learned to eat the food which his mother liked. He often watched her swimming around the bay, with her great mouth hanging open. There were millions of the tiniest kind of creatures living in the water. They flowed into her mouth at the same time with the water. When she felt them tickling and wiggling over her tongue she closed her jaw almost shut. A sieve of long elastic strips of bone fell like a curtain from the roof of her mouth. Then the water drained out between the strips of bone, leaving the tiny animals inside to be swallowed.

Instead of teeth the baby whale found such a fringe of whalebone strips growing on the roof of his mouth. When it was long enough to use he began to swim around with his jaw hanging down. Every day, in this way, he caught and ate thousands of tiny shrimps and crabs and mussels. He could not swallow any large fish because his throat was only a few inches wide.

He did not know that there are different whales in a different part of the sea. These other whales have teeth instead of whalebone sieves. In the tops of their heads they have great holes filled with sperm oil. Their throats are wide enough to swallow a man. They are called sperm whales, but the whales with whalebone strips in their mouths are called true whales.

When the baby stopped drinking milk the mother set out with him to leave the bay, and find the father whale in the deep sea without. The young whale could swim almost as fast as the old one now. He could stay under water without breathing quite as long as she could. The warm blanket of blubber under his skin had grown thicker. It kept him warm and helped him to float.

Perhaps he was afraid to leave the safe bay for the wide ocean. He kept close beside his mother as they went rushing on, with their tails slapping up and down and around. The tail sent each one ahead, just as the screw of a steamer drives it forward. With their flippers they steadied their round bodies so that they would not roll over and over like logs.

Out between the rocky cliffs, at the mouth of the inlet, they rushed through the green water. After travelling some distance out to sea the baby noticed that the water looked black below them, reaching down and down and down. He could not see the oozy, shell-covered floor, as in the bay. Above him the waves were larger, and swayed to and fro, cresting in foam. The big fishes were darting hither and thither before the great round, rushing bodies of the mother and the baby whale.

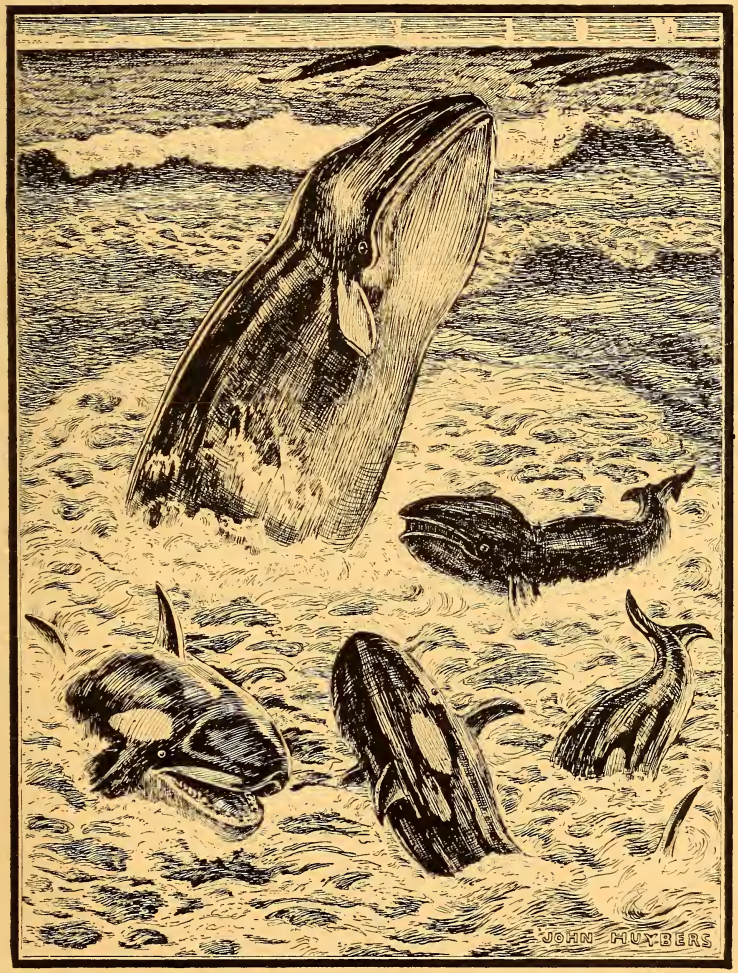
Very likely the old whale had been lonesome in the bay. She swam on in a hurry to find her mate and the rest of the herd. The baby followed as hard as he could paddle. This was a wonderful new world to him. Probably he wanted to stop and look around, especially when he rose to breathe. Once he gave a mighty jump and shot out far above the waves. He could not see well, except directly behind him. But while above there in the air he twisted in a curving leap. Everywhere water, water, water, stretching on and on and on.

He could not see a single sign of any other whales being near. Yet somehow or other the

old mother knew that they were not far away. It may be that she could hear through the water, as if telephone-wires were spread under the waves. Sure enough! soon the baby heard the splashing of heavy bodies turning over and over in slow rolling. When he rose to breathe he caught sight of spouting fountains, where the other whales were blowing in the sea.

When the strangers came swimming toward him he hung back behind his mother. They glided about him, now and then touching him with their fins, noses, or tails. They twisted around so as to see him with their dull little eyes. Then they went on with their eating and lazy rolling on the surface of the sea.

The baby and his mother belonged to the herd now. It was time for them all to start north to colder waters, as summer was near. Food was growing scarce in that part of the ocean. When the whales stayed too long in one place barnacles and limpets fastened on the huge bodies, and made them uncomfortable. One day the baby felt a tickling barnacle on his throat. He scratched so hard



THE WHALE.

"When the strangers came swimming toward him he hung back behind his mother." *Page* 36.

against a jagged rock that he tore a rent a foot long in the blubber. But it did not hurt much, and in a few days it was healed.

There were a number of other young whales in the herd. The biggest old father whale took the lead while the rest followed, on and on, moving through the sea all day long. Sometimes they stopped to swim around and around with their mouths hanging open. The tiny crabs and other animals flowed in upon the great satiny white tongues. Sometimes they all took pleasant naps while floating on the surface. Once a sea-bird flew down and pecked at a barnacle on the baby's head.

At night the herd lay still, sleeping beneath the stars. All around them the ocean glimmered and twinkled. The ripples shone with fiery light. Now and then one or another big whale blew out his warm breath slowly and drowsily, his great sides heaving in a tremendous sigh. Then, when the morning came, and the sky grew bright at the horizon, they woke and plunged below for breakfast. They did not even look at the beautiful colors in the sky.

Nearly every day the young ones had a race. Off and away! their bodies bending like bows, their broad tails churning the water into foaming waves behind them. Many a time the baby dived down, down, down, till the water looked black around him. Then, when he was almost smothering under the heavy weight of the sea, he turned in a hurry, and went rushing up with a bound and a puff. He shot out into the sunshine with a mighty leap. What a tremendous splashing he made as he fell back on his side, while all the other baby whales slapped the water with their tails under the shower of spray!

One morning he had a terrible fright. It happened that he lagged behind the herd to catch one more mouthful of breakfast. When at last he was ready to follow the rest he saw three strange animals hurrying after him. They were almost as big as he was, and they had fierce little eyes and sharp white teeth. He was so afraid that he swam as fast as he could.

They were really a kind of small whale that eats the tongues of large whales. They were called killers. All three raced after the baby.

One caught hold of his lip and tried to drag his mouth open. The other two pulled and bit at the other side of the poor frightened fellow. Just as they had his mouth almost open, and were snapping like wolves at sight of his tongue, they heard the old mother whale come tearing back to the rescue.

Before they had time to dart away she dived head foremost. Raising her great tail she swept it around and around, churning the water into foam. One dreadful blow crushed a killer, and the others rushed away. Seizing the trembling baby between her flippers and neck the mother hurried on to catch up with the herd again.

This was excitement enough for one day. Indeed, it was the greatest adventure of the year, except for the narrow escape from the ice-floe. This last adventure happened when the herd was just leaving the north to swim south again. The baby whale was quite a big fellow by this time. By some accident he found himself shut into a bay by a floating mass of ice.

The ice-floe covered the water and was driv-

ing closer and closer to the shore. The young whale swam ahead of it till he was almost on the beach. Still it kept pressing nearer and nearer. Again and again he tried to swim under it, but he could not hold his breath long enough to get through to the open sea. If he could not breathe he would drown, just like any other mammal.

Finally, just as the ice was rubbing against the big black sides, he raised himself high in the air and threw his heavy body with a crash down on the floe. Luckily, he happened to strike a thin place. The immense cake of ice cracked and split. The whale gave a plunge and broke his way through to safety. He was glad enough to find the herd again and swim on with them toward the southern waters.

So down along the shore the huge beasts went frolicking together. They leaped out of the sea, turning summersaults and tumbling over and over. They patted one another with such resounding smacks of their flippers that the noise was like thunder. Now they darted ahead, leaving a wake of dancing foam; now they dived, arching their backs, and flirting

their tails high in the air. And through the quiet nights they lay with the waves lapping softly against them, with the starlight glistening upon the great black bodies rolling in the swell.

IV

THE BUFFALO (BISON)

"THE ONE THAT LIVES IN A CROWD"

THE BUFFALO.

"The big brown mother buffalo was bending her shaggy head to lick his curly yellow coat." *Page* 45.

THE ONE THAT LIVES IN A CROWD

UNDER a tree, by the slow-flowing river, a new little buffalo calf staggered to his feet. First he straightened his clumsy hind-legs, and then hobbled awkwardly up from his knees. The big brown mother buffalo was bending her shaggy head to lick his curly yellow coat with her red tongue.

The calf swayed a little from side to side, for it was the first time he ever stood upon his own long legs. He rolled his bright eyes slowly about the strange green world in which he found himself. It was an April world. There were tiny new leaves on the branches overhead, and there were spears of fresh grass pricking through the old brown turf underfoot.

Far and away, scattered over the prairie like dark dots, there were other buffaloes feeding, — hundreds and hundreds of mother buffaloes, with little yellow calves beside them.

Miles farther away, in the hillier places out of sight, there were herds of great hairy, hump-backed father buffaloes, feeding by themselves. These buffaloes were the largest four-footed mammals in America.

The old mother buffalo did not let the baby stand there alone under the tree for very long. As soon as he could walk without staggering she led him down to join the others on the prairie. After that he was never alone for a single day through the years and years, because all the rest of his life was spent in a crowd.

Nobody seemed to notice the new baby when he followed his mother into the herd. The old buffaloes did not even lift their heads from grazing, and the little ones kept on with their frisking. This last youngest calf was now only one in a crowd, and a very large crowd at that.

When he woke up in the morning he was in a crowd of buffaloes, blinking in the early sunbeams on the hilly slopes. The little ones lay pressed close to their mothers, their legs doubled under their shaggy bodies. The baby hobbled to his feet in a crowd of other calves.

They nudged and butted hungrily. The mothers got up and stood patiently switching their tufted tails, while the hundreds of calves tugged for the milk. They stretched out their necks and kept moving from one side to another as they drank.

When the old buffaloes walked out over the prairie to tear off mouthfuls of juicy grass the young ones played in a frisky crowd. They galloped round and round, sometimes jumping into the air and coming down, stiff-legged, on all four feet. Sometimes one rushed at another to butt him over from behind. Then, kicking out his little black hoofs, he scuttled back to his mother. Sometimes they rolled over and over, pawing the air.

Once in a while two of the calves pretended to have a dreadful fight. Lashing their tails and shaking their heads they pawed the ground. Their little eyes glared as they rushed together with a bang and a bump and a clash of round furry heads. Each one pushed and struggled to throw the other down to his knees, while the other little fellows looked on, excitedly ba-a-a-ing.

Every evening they all stopped feeding at a signal from the wisest old cow buffalo. In a crowd they went to the river to drink. Single file they followed along the deep-cut paths over the prairie. The thirsty old mothers walked on fast, swinging their heads low. The babies ran panting through the clouds of dust, their fuzzy sides heaving and their aching knees wobbling under them.

When they reached the river the old ones waded in knee-deep. After drinking their fill they stood with the water running out of their mouths, while they idly lashed their sides with their short tails. Once the youngest calf tried to wade in after his mother. At the first touch of the water over his feet he turned and rushed sprawling up the bank. The soft mud gurgled and splashed under his little black hoofs. Then there he stood and bellowed, like the silliest sort of a baby, the tears rolling down his nose.

However, he soon learned to enjoy a bath in any kind of water, clean or muddy. Indeed, at times he seemed to like muddy puddles best. Along the river there were pools which had been scraped out deep and wide by

the wallowing of hundreds of buffaloes. Each one plunged in head-first, and swung round and round on his side till he was covered all over with thick mud. This coat of mud dried on and kept the insects from biting.

Many a warm afternoon the big flies settled down on the baby's back, just out of reach of his tufted tail. There they bored and bored till the blood welled up in a big red drop. He kicked and stamped and lashed his tail, and finally galloped away to the old mud-holes beside the river.

When the evening shadows stretched over the prairie in the gray dusk, the calves ate a supper like their breakfast. Then on the hill-slope each little one doubled his legs under him, and snuggled close to his big warm mother. While he was falling asleep he could hear her chewing her cud. Now and then he felt her warm breath tickle his nose as she turned to smell him gently.

Very likely he did not understand what she was chewing so long. Later, when he cut his teeth, he learned all about it. Like all the other buffaloes he never had any teeth in the front of his upper jaw. Instead of teeth he

had a horny pad there. Whenever he bent to get a mouthful to eat he took hold of the grass between his lower front teeth and this pad; then he jerked it away with a twist of his head. After giving it a few chews he swallowed it, and went on tearing off more.

Of course what he swallowed then was only half chewed. So it was swallowed into a part of his stomach, from which it could be raised into his mouth again when he had time to chew it more thoroughly. The second chewing was called chewing the cud. He could chew the cud while he was standing idly in the shade or lying down on the soft grass. Then he swallowed the food into the part of his stomach where it stayed down.

Some time before the baby's teeth were grown enough for him to be weaned, his little curved horns came sprouting through his forehead. They were hollow horns, black and smooth and shiny, like his hoofs. The hoofs were really only toe-nails grown thick and tough enough to walk on. Animals like the buffalo walk on the nails of two toes, and so they seem to have a hoof split in two parts. Animals like the horse walk on one toe-nail.

All summer long the calves frisked and nursed and grew. Then, as autumn came on, food was harder to find. Out on the prairie the grass was turned yellow and dry like hay. The herd of buffalo cows and calves wandered farther and farther in search of fresh and juicy food.

Once they reached a place where for miles and miles the grasshoppers had eaten every green leaf and blade of grass. They hurried across this bare spot at a gallop. After running so hard that the youngest calves began to drop behind, they found a beautiful green valley. There was a cool river running through it, and the grass was thick and sweet.

The mother buffaloes ate and ate hungrily. Then they roamed on, with the tired calves straggling after them. Soon they met a herd of old father buffaloes, and they all wandered on, feeding together. Before very long they were joined by other herds, and still others, till they were all part of one great band that dotted the prairie from horizon to horizon.

The old bull buffaloes were bigger than the cows. Their horns were larger, and the hair was shaggier on their shoulders. Their little

eyes looked wild and fierce under their tangled frontlets. The beards on their chins swept the ground.

When two bulls had a fight the little calves were frightened enough. The two big fellows bellowed and pawed the ground. They lashed their tails, and tore up the earth with their horns. After pacing to and fro a few minutes they lowered their heads and rushed together with a crash. They pushed and prodded and pounded with their horns. None of them were ever badly hurt, for the horns were not sharp enough to cut through the thick cushions of fur on their heads and shoulders. But still, the baby calf always felt like running away in a tremble and hiding behind his mother.

So the autumn passed. The vast herd moved slowly over the prairie, grazing as they went, and resting at midday and at night. The days became shorter. Often at night the frosty rime fell white on the little calf's thick curly coat. His fur was turning from bright yellow to brown. The old buffaloes were wearing bright winter coats of brown and buff, which would be dingy and ragged before spring.

Sometimes the grass that they tore away with a jerk was frozen icy, and made their tongues feel cold as they swallowed it. How lively the calves became in the frosty air! They were always ready for a caper, kicking out their heels and galloping round and round. They raced helter-skelter, their spiky tails held straight out behind their clumsy bodies. As their shoulders grew more humped and hairy they looked like plunging brown waves when they tore across the prairie in a lumbering gallop.

When the first snow fell that winter the young ones must have been surprised to see the prairie all white, and to feel the soft flakes melting on their noses. Perhaps they tried to eat it, and found it a queer-tasting kind of food. It seemed to burn their tongues like fire. Then they watched the old buffaloes paw away the snow to munch the grass beneath. It was hard work to find enough to eat now, when the cold weather made them all so hungry. The babies learned to eat every tuft of grass clear down to the roots.

The snow was soft at first, and easily dug away with paw and nose, but after the

winter settled upon the land the snow hardened. It was more icy when it fell. Then it melted a bit in the sunlight, and froze again at night. That formed an icy crust on top. The calves often scratched their noses in scooping a hole down to the food. When they were thirsty they licked the snow, or else stamped holes through the ice on the river. They were the hardiest mammals in America. With their thick coats of fur they could live through greater hunger, thirst, and cold than any of the others.

One day there was a dreadful blizzard. The afternoon grew bitterly cold and cloudy. Snow was driving along in blinding gusts. The buffaloes, with their heads held low before the wind, pushed on toward a sheltered valley. They rushed and jostled down the cliff. They leaped from shelf to shelf of rock, now sliding over a steep slope, now gathering their feet for a spring. Slipping and sliding, sending clay and stones rolling ahead, they scrambled down to the foot of the cliff. They could climb wonderfully well for such clumsy looking animals.

There they huddled close together, with their

heads turned inward and their tails outward to the storm. Once in a while one pawed away the snow to get a few blades of grass while they waited. Still it snowed and snowed, drifting over the edge of the cliff, and piling up over the buffaloes till it buried them from sight. The snow was so light that they could breathe under it, and it kept them warm from the biting wind.

By the next morning they were able to scramble out. They ploughed through the drifts to the ledges, swept clean by the wind. In winter they did not find much food in the ravines, where snow was deep, but on the bleakest ridges, where the winds laid bare the last year's grass.

During this cold and hungry time the calves needed to be very careful not to lag too far behind the herd. They were not big enough yet to fight for themselves. There were fierce wolves prowling near, on the watch to kill any buffaloes that were weak or sick. The baby kept close to his mother, and the old father stayed beside them to protect them both.

The little calf could not see far enough to notice the wolves stealing like gray shadows

from rock to rock at twilight. But more than once, when he was cuddling down to sleep in the crowd, he smelled them, and he heard their hungry howls.

The calves were all glad when winter passed and spring came again with its tender grass and delightful mud-baths beside the river in the sunshine. Then in earliest spring something happened that frightened the calves almost to death. It was the strangest thing. All the herd ran away together. None of them knew why they were running, and none knew how to stop. It happened in this way:

The thousands of buffaloes were scattered over the prairie, feeding on the sprouting grass. Presently one, and then another, lifted his shaggy head to listen. There was a low rumbling noise like far-off thunder. The sound swelled louder and louder as it swept toward them. Far away over the prairie a mass of dark, galloping forms came rushing nearer and nearer. Their shaggy frontlets loomed dimly through columns of dust.

The baby calf looked around. He saw his mother throw up her tail and start on a gallop. Then all the other buffaloes near

began to run. They tore onward to the river. The calf galloped after them as fast as he could. He did not know why they were frightened. He saw the twinkling eyes under the shaggy frontlets; he saw the hoofs flying; he heard the panting breaths. If he stopped he would be thrown down and trampled to death. So he ran for his life. The earth shook under the thundering gallop of the stampeded herd.

On they rushed headlong. They tore over the plain, ploughing it into dust with their countless hoofs. They dashed over the brink of the river, raced down to the water, splashed through it, and clambered up the bluffs on the other side. Then on and on over the plain.

The little calf ran till his legs ached and his breath came hard. His heart pounded against his ribs. His feet felt too heavy to lift. His eyes were blurred, and his tongue hung out of his mouth. Just as he felt that he could not take another step, but must lie down and die under the galloping hoofs of the others, the herd began to go more slowly.

In a few minutes they stopped galloping and fell into a walk. Here and there one

halted to look for a bite of grass on the torn earth. A few trotted on, switching their tails. The little calf stopped, and stood panting.

That night he lay down to sleep by himself, for he had lost his mother in the stampede. But the next morning she heard him when he called her in his ba-a-a-ing voice. Perhaps he asked her in the buffalo language why they had run away. Nobody knows what she may have answered. Doubtless he learned, as he grew older, that buffaloes, like other animals living in herds, are easily frightened. If one of them starts to run away the others will follow without waiting to find out the reason. That is the great danger of living in a crowd.

V

THE ELK (WAPITI)

"ONE OF THE FLEETEST"

ONE OF THE FLEETEST

IT was the most interesting thing! The big brother elk, who was just a year old, peered in through the branches, his ears pointed forward. His great soft eyes were shining, and his nostrils were quivering with excitement. There, on a bed of leaves in the mountain-thicket, lay a new little baby elk.

He looked like the big brother, except for the white spots on his satiny brown coat. With his slender legs doubled under him he lay perfectly still, not even twitching his ears, as old deer to catch the slightest sound. He was looking up at his big brown mother standing beside him.

The brother elk edged nearer and nearer, till a branch crackled under his hoofs. Instantly the old mother raised her head and pricked her ears in the direction of the sound. When she caught sight of the brother she drew back her lips from her teeth and squealed angrily. Her eyes gleamed. She began to

walk toward him, squealing and shaking her head to drive him away. He was so surprised that he snorted out loud. Then backing off, first one foot and then the other, he hid among some trees close by.

He must have felt very lonesome as he waited there by himself on the mountain. He listened to every rustle of a leaf or crackle of a twig in the thicket where the baby was lying. Before this his mother had always been kind to him. He did not know why she drove him away, — when he was not doing any harm. The reason was because every little noise made her nervous. She was afraid wolves or panthers might come prowling around there, where the baby lay helpless on the leaves.

After a few days the baby scrambled to his feet and went staggering a bit unsteadily after his mother as she led the way out from the thicket. The big brother came timidly up to them. He smelled the little one very gently, nosing all over his soft dappled body. The mother did not pay much attention, and the baby was not afraid. He stood quite still, looking around with his shining eyes.

It was a beautiful world in May. All around him there were groves of aspens twinkling their silvery leaves in the early sunlight. Farther up the mountain-side dark evergreens grew thick among the rocks. Down the valley a brook splashed and gurgled over stones on its way to a lake lying in the cool shadow of the pines.

Very likely, although the baby elk could see well enough, he cared more for the things which he could smell. There was such a delicious fragrance everywhere of spicy evergreens and the damp sweet breath of mosses and blossoming flowers. Of course he was too young to taste the juicy grasses and tender twigs, but he surely enjoyed the tempting odor of it all. The world smelled very good to eat.

Like all little mammals he drank milk till his teeth cut through his gums later in the year. Like the buffaloes the older elk had horny pads instead of teeth in the front of their upper jaws. They tore off a mouthful of grass or leaves with a jerk of the head and swallowed it half chewed. Then, during the heat of the day, when they were lying down to rest in the shade, or standing in pools

of water, they drew up the fodder from their stomachs and chewed it again.

All summer long the little elk lived in the mountains with his mother and brother. At night he slept nestled close to them in some safe thicket. In the daytime he trotted beside them as they roamed grazing over the upland meadows and along the brooks. Though they were fond of feeding near the water they did not care so much as some other kinds of deer to eat lily-leaves.

In the early part of the summer the mother and brother looked very ragged. Their thick winter coat began to fall out. It was so matted that it clung to the body like a torn blanket. Every time they rubbed against a bush or thorny tree their old hair was torn in long strips and tatters. When at last it had all been rubbed off their fresh short, summer fur shone out bright and glistening in the sunshine.

Little by little the white spots on the baby's coat were fading. By the end of August he was all in plain brown like the older ones, with only a patch of white around his tail. Probably he did not notice the difference

THE ELK.

"Grazing over the upland meadows." *Page* 64.

himself because he could not turn his head far enough to see many of the spots on his sides and neck.

Indeed he was astonished enough one day, while still in the spotted coat, to see another little spotted elk come timidly out of a thicket of aspens. At first both babies stood still, with their ears pricked forward and their big soft eyes wide open. Then the first one bravely walked up to the other and smelled him all over. After that they were friends and played together. They could both say ba-a-a, and drink milk, and gallop over the grass, with their little hoofs kicking out behind.

The next day another mother elk with a baby and a big brother joined the band. Then another family came, and another, till there were dozens and dozens of them all together. Such scampering frolics as the little ones enjoyed! While the old mothers were quietly grazing over the steep slopes the babies raced from one rock to another. Each one tried to push up first to the highest point, and then stand there, looking down at the others. Once the roughest little fellow butted

another off a high rock and almost broke his leg.

When a baby butted with his round little head it did not hurt much. But the big brothers all had sharp antlers sprouting from their foreheads. In the spring the knobs above their eyes had begun to swell and grow out into bony spikes covered with a velvety network of skin and veins. These antlers were different from the horns worn by the buffaloes. Every buffalo had a pair of horns that lasted all his life. The mother buffaloes had horns, but the mother elk did not have antlers. The antlers were solid bone instead of hollow like the horns. Each of the father elks and the big brothers had a new pair every spring to replace the old pair that dropped off during the winter.

By mid-summer the antlers stopped growing. Then the big brothers in the band pounded and rubbed their antlers against bushes and young trees, so as to strip off the velvety covering. When they had sham fights they could butt hard enough to hurt. They bumped their heads together, and pushed with all their might to see which was the strongest.

Autumn was not far off now, and the band of mother elk and young ones began to move down from the mountains to the foot-hills. In winter the snow lay so deep in the high valleys that they could not walk far or find enough to eat. Farther and farther down they wandered every day. The babies were learning to eat grass like the older ones.

One morning the smallest baby elk was picking his steps along the edge of a cliff. He halted and raised his pretty head to look far up the canyon before him. There, away off against the pine-woods on the mountain-side, he caught sight of a spot of brown moving toward him. Nearer and nearer it came, till he saw that it was an animal even bigger than his mother. It was an old father elk coming down from his summer retreat in the highest gorges.

In all his short life the baby had never seen such a stately and beautiful creature. His mother was not nearly so large as this elk, and she wore no antlers at all. The big brother's antlers were only short spikes without any prongs. On strode the newcomer, leaping over fallen trees and wading through

the brooks to join the band. His long black mane was waving on his neck; his nostrils were quivering; his great eyes were flashing; his splendid antlers rose, branching high above his graceful head.

The fine stranger stalked among the others and smelled them, in their way of getting acquainted. Then he began to feed with them all. The mother elk and little ones followed meekly when he started to lead the band down the mountain. He did not pay much attention to the babies. Sometimes he pushed them out of his way, or drove them hither and thither, as he pleased. He was a selfish old fellow and never thought of taking care of the others. Whenever he found a delicious tuft of juicy grass he hurried to munch it all by himself.

As the frosty days passed by another father elk appeared, and then another and another. Each one wanted to be leader of the band. Many a snowy night the baby elk huddled close to his mother as he listened to the noise of the old father elk roaming through the woods. He could hear them snuffing the frosty air. They beat the bushes with their antlers and stamped on the crackling branches

underfoot. The snow lay thick on their bristling manes. Now here in the valley, now there high on the ridge, the sound of their whistling came pealing down through the still white woods in the moonlight.

Often and often the baby trembled as he heard the shrill squealing of two old elk fighting together. Each one was trying to drive the other away from the band. They rushed together with a crash, and pushed and strained, with their antlers locked tight. Though the prongs could not cut through the tough skin of their shoulders, still the weaker one always had to give way and run. The other chased him off and then came back, whistling and barking in triumph, to be leader of the band.

In a few weeks the old elk became tired of fighting. The band settled down to spend a peaceful winter together. Their fur grew long and thick to keep out the cold. On they travelled mile after mile. They were looking for a sheltered spot to be their home during the coldest weather.

The old elk walked so fast that the babies had to gallop to keep from being left behind. Up hills and down gorges they went crashing

through thickets and over the rocks. They climbed steep cliffs and went leaping down narrow trails. Even the little ones were sure-footed. They never stumbled or slipped as they bounded over the dead logs and tangled vines between the trees.

At last they found a wooded spot where the hills sheltered them from the bitterest winds. There was grass on the ground. There were plenty of young trees with twigs and buds and bark for them to eat. A swift little brook ran over the rocks not far away.

Here in this place the band of elk spent the winter. When the snow fell deeper they trod it into narrow paths by walking from tree to tree to feed. These paths led to and fro, criss-crossing, and around in uneven curves all through the yard, as it may be called. With every storm the snow beside the paths piled higher and higher, till the baby could not see over the edges, even when he stretched up his neck.

It must have been a dreary winter for the little fellow. Night after night he huddled beside his mother to keep warm. Sometimes the stars sparkled above the white earth, and

sometimes the wind sifted the icy flakes over their brown bodies. Day after day of cold and storm he walked along the paths from tree to tree. Here he could reach a bunch of dead leaves, there a cluster of twig-ends, or a mouthful of bark.

The older elk were so much taller than he was that they could reach the higher branches by standing on their hind-legs and stretching out their necks. Often he went hungry, for the fodder near the paths was all eaten before spring. The snow was so deep outside the yard that he could not touch solid ground with his feet. Sometimes he pawed through the icy crust, and dug away the snow from over the grass.

Once a pack of wolves came prowling near and tried to drive the elk out into the deep snow. Though the elk, like all deer, are the fleetest of mammals, the wolves could run better over the snow, for their broad paws did not sink in so far as the elk's slender hoofs. Instead of running away all the mother elk rushed squealing after the wolves and tried to stamp them to death. The mother elk were always very brave in taking care of

their little ones. The cowardly old fathers were afraid to fight anything, now that they had lost their sharp antlers.

Spring came at last, and the snow melted from the hill-tops and then from the valleys. The first tender grass began to sprout in the meadows. The elk left their winter home and scattered over the plains in search of food. The sun shone and the soft winds blew.

The baby elk followed his mother, when she left the others, and started up toward the mountains. He wandered after her, grazing as he went, till he lost her in a mountain thicket. While he was looking for her he heard a rustling of twigs. He peered through the branches, and there he saw a new little baby elk lying on a bed of leaves. The old mother was standing over him, and licking his satiny spotted coat with her long red tongue.

VI

THE BEAVER

"THE BEST BUILDER"

THE BEST BUILDER

OUT in the woods rain was pouring down steadily from the black sky. It beat against the leaves and trickled over the trunks of the trees and spattered into the pond. Now and then a flash of lightning glimmered over the water and twinkled in through the hole at the top of the little round house where the beavers lived.

From the outside this house looked like a heap of old brush-wood on a tiny island in the middle of the pond. But inside of it there was a little room, like a cave, with a smooth floor and an arched roof. Along the sides of this room there were five beds of leaves and grass. On one of these beds lay three baby beavers fast asleep in the dark.

The other beds were all empty. The big one at the end belonged to the father beaver. Before the babies were born in May he had gone away for the summer. He had started off with all the other old fathers in the beaver

village to have a good time in the woods up the brook. They played and feasted on roots and plants, while the mother beavers stayed home to take care of the babies.

The other three beds belonged to the mother and to her two older children. On this rainy summer night they had gone out to eat their supper under the trees by the pond.

Suddenly the three baby beavers opened their eyes with a start, and rolled off their bed. They had been awakened by the sound of a loud whack on the water outside. It was a noise made by the mother's flat tail as she dived down toward the door of her house. Her front hall was a tunnel that led from the bottom of the pond to the floor of the dark little room. Through this she went swimming, while the waves bubbled and splashed around her.

When the babies saw her round head poke up through the door in the floor they squeaked and ran to meet her. She was carrying a bundle of small sticks between her chin and her fore-paw. Each little beaver sat up on his hind-legs, with his tail propping him steady from behind. Then he took one of the sticks

in his hands and began to nibble the bark with his new yellow teeth.

They were wonderful teeth. After the babies were too old to live on milk, four curved teeth grew out in the front of each little mouth. Two were in the upper jaw and two in the lower jaw. It was the strangest thing! The more these teeth gnawed the sharper they became. The inner side of each tooth was softer than the outer side. In biting together, the inner edge wore down faster, and left the outer edge as sharp as a knife.

The beaver belongs to the *Order of Gnawers*. Squirrels and rabbits and rats and many other mammals belong to this order. They all have these chisel-shaped front teeth, which keep on growing all their lives long. If any one of them is too lazy to gnaw every day his teeth grow so long that he cannot bite anything at all. Beavers are the largest of the gnawing animals, except the water-hog of South America. They have stronger teeth than any of the others.

Not long after this stormy night the mother beaver decided to take the three babies out with her into the woods. She chose another

rainy evening because then their enemies were not likely to be wandering under the dripping trees. Bears and foxes and wild-cats hate to get wet, but beavers enjoy feeling the cool water trickle over their fur and splash on their tails.

Except for their broad, flat tails, the three little beavers looked like rats covered with silky brown fur. The mother seemed like a giant rat, about three feet long from her round nose to the root of her tail. Instead of fur her tail was covered with thick skin. This skin was so creased and dented that it looked like scales.

What an exciting evening it was for the babies! One behind the other they trotted down the dark tunnel after their mother. At first the floor was dry and hard. After a few steps their feet touched something wet. Soft mud oozed between the fingers on their fore-paws. Their hind-feet were webbed up to the toe-nails, and so did not sink in so deep as their fore-paws. Beavers are the only mammals which have webs on one pair of feet, and not on the other pair. They are half land animals and half water animals.

This was not the first time that the three little beavers had ventured into the tunnel. More than once before they had crept down as far as the water and waded about at the edge. But now they kept right on, splashing in farther and farther. The water grew deeper and deeper. In the dark they felt it wash up to their knees, and then up to their chins, and finally away over their backs and their heads to the roof of the tunnel.

Away went the three babies swimming after the old mother. They held their breaths, and shut their ears tight. Their small fore-paws hung down by their sides. They paddled with their webbed hind-feet, and used their broad tails as rudders, to send them now this way, now that.

It seemed the longest time to the last little beaver before his head popped up into the fresh air above the pond. He blinked his light-brown eyes, and winked away the drops on his eyelashes. Now and then a flash of lightning glimmered on the trees around the pond. Of course he did not know yet that his food came from those tall, shadowy things at the edge of the water.

Half-way to the shore a round, dark spot was ploughing through the water, with two ripples spreading out behind it. It was the head of the mother beaver. Behind her followed another head, and then another. The last little beaver swung his tail around and started after them. He puffed and sputtered when a wave washed over his nose. But he did not mind that at all, because this cool water was much pleasanter than the stale air in the warm room at home.

There, under a bush on the bank, he saw his older brother and sister sitting on their tails, while they nibbled the bark from some sticks beside them. When the baby reached his hand toward the pile they grunted and sniffed at him. Just then a flash of lightning gleamed on their long, yellow teeth, and frightened the little fellow so much that he scampered after his mother and the two other babies.

They followed a path into the woods. The father beavers in the village had made it by cutting down trees and bushes and dragging them out of the way. It was a straight path, and more than wide enough for the fattest old beaver. But the last baby was so much afraid

THE BEAVER.

"Across the pond to feast in the woods." *Page* 81.

of being left behind that he ran without looking on the ground. He stumbled over two low stumps, and bumped into a trunk at one side, before he caught up to the others.

He saw the mother beaver standing on her hind-legs under a tree. She reached up as high as she could with her mouth and gnawed off a branch. When it fell crackling and rustling she called the three babies to come and learn how to cut their own sticks to eat. She showed them how to set their teeth against the bark, and tear off a chip with a jerk of the head. Another chip and another was gnawed out till the branch was cut in two. The mother could bite through a small stick with one snip of her jaws.

After that, every night all summer long, the three babies followed their mother out through the tunnel and across the pond to feast in the woods. They ate tender grasses and roots as well as bark. Sometimes they went out before dark to romp and play tag in the pond. The biggest little beaver thought that it was the greatest fun to push the others off floating logs. He chased them round and round, splashing water in their faces and mak-

ing them duck their heads. They enjoyed the fun as much as he did, especially after they all scrambled upon the bank to rest.

On land, the biggest baby was too fat and clumsy to move as fast as the other two. They danced about on their hind-legs, and pretended to step on his tail or pull his fur. It was beautiful fur, so fine and thick and soft that water could not soak through to the skin. The babies did not have a coat of coarse outer hair like the old beavers. When tired of play they sat up and scratched their heads and shoulders with the claws on their hairy fore-paws. Then, after combing their sides with their hind-feet, they curled down in the grass for a nap.

There were plenty of other little low houses in the pond, and in each one lived a family of beavers. The three babies made friends with all the other babies. Together they explored every corner of the pond, from the brook at the upper end to the dam at the lower end.

Very likely the little fellows believed that the dam had always been there. But in fact the old beavers had built it themselves. When they first came to that spot in the woods

they found only a brook flowing over a hard, gravelly bottom. They first cut down a bush and floated it along till it stuck fast between a rock and a clump of trees. Next they cut other bushes, and carried down poles and branches, till they had a tangle of brush stretching from one bank to the other. Upon this they piled sticks and stones and mud, and then more sticks and stones and mud, and then still more sticks and stones and mud.

At last the dam was so high and solid that the water could not flow through. So it spread out in a pond above the dam till it was deep enough to trickle over the top and tinkle away in a little brook under the trees.

Tiny islands were left here and there in the pond. The old beavers built their houses on the islands or on the bank. First each mother and father dug two tunnels from the bottom of the pond up through the earth to the floor of their house. One tunnel was to be used when going in and out during the summer. The other tunnel led to their winter pantry under the water. This pantry was to be a pile of fresh sticks cut in the woods every autumn.

Around the two holes in the floor the beavers laid logs and stones in a circle. Upon this foundation they piled sticks and sod to form walls and a roof. Then they plastered the house all over with mud. At the top of the roof they left a small hole, covered only with a tangle of sticks. This was for fresh air. Last of all they swam inside and made the walls even by gnawing off the sharp ends of the wood. Then the house was ready to be furnished with beds of leaves and grasses.

Perhaps during the happy summer the babies believed that play was the most delightful thing in the world. But soon the father beavers came strolling back to the village to cut down trees for the winter. Then the little fellows found that work was even better fun than play.

One night the three babies followed their parents into the woods and watched them cut down a tree. The father stood up on his hind-legs, propping himself with his tail, and began to cut a notch around the trunk. The mother helped on the other side. They gnawed upward and downward, digging out huge chips with their chisel teeth. The circle

grew deeper and deeper, till the father's head was almost hidden whenever he thrust it in to take a fresh bite.

When finally the wood cracked and the tree-top began to sway all the family scampered away to the pond. They dived for the tunnel and hid in the house for a while. There was danger that some hungry wild-cat had heard the crash of the branches and had hurried there to catch them for its supper.

As soon as it seemed safe to do so the beavers paddled out again and trotted away to the fallen tree. The parents trimmed off the branches and cut the trunk into pieces short enough to carry. The father seized a thick pole in his teeth and swung it over his shoulders. As he dragged it toward the pond he kept his head twisted to one side, so that the end of the pole trailed on the ground.

The biggest little beaver tried to drag a smaller branch in the same way. When he rose on his hind-legs, so as to walk along more easily, he forgot to brace himself with his tail. The branch caught on a stone and tipped him backwards, heels over head. The

two other babies were rolling a short log by pushing it with their noses. At the sound of their brother's surprised squeals they gave the log a last wild poke. It seemed to make a jump over a bump, and then tumbled into a hole. There it stayed, though they pushed and pulled and puffed and grunted in trying to get it out again.

It happened that the father beaver reached the pond just in time to help mend the dam with his thick pole. A pointed log had jammed a hole in the dam. The water was beginning to pour through the hole with a rush. If the pond should run dry the doors of the tunnels would be left in plain sight. Then probably a wolf, or some other enemy, would hide there to catch the beavers on their way from the woods to their houses.

The old father pushed his pole into the water; then he jumped in, and, taking hold of it with his teeth, he swam out above the hole. When he let go the water carried the pole squarely across the break in the dam. The other beavers cut bushes and floated them down to weave across the hole. After that they scooped up mud and stones to plaster

the dam till not a drop trickled through the mended places.

The next work to be done that autumn was to gather food for the winter. Some of the trees with the juiciest bark grew too far away to be easily dragged to the pond. All the grown-up beavers set to work to dig a canal. They dug and scooped and gnawed off roots, and dragged out stones, till they had made a long canal more than a foot deep. The water flowed into this from the pond. Then it was easy enough to float wood from the juicy trees down to the beaver village.

Even the babies could help in towing the wood down the canal and across the pond to the different houses. Some of the wood became so heavy with soaked-up water that it sank to the bottom beside the doors, and could be packed in a solid pile as easily as on land. Most of the wood, however, kept light enough to float. Instead of heaping new sticks on top, the beavers pushed them under the top branches. Then more was pressed under that, and more under that, till the pile reached to the bottom. In the winter, of course, the top sticks could not be eaten,

because they would be frozen fast in the ice.

The autumn days were growing frostier and frostier. After mending the dam and gathering their woodpiles, the beavers plastered a last coat of mud all over the outside of their houses. The mud froze hard and made the little rooms inside as safe as a fort, with walls two feet thick. The babies carried leaves and grasses for their fresh beds. With a bundle tucked between his chin and forepaw, each one hobbled along on three legs, "working like a beaver," as the saying is.

One cloudy night, when the beavers were busy out in the woods, something soft and cold began to float down through the chilly air. The biggest baby felt a sting on his nose. When he put out his tongue to lick it he touched only a speck of water. Bits of white sifted on his fur and melted in drops. Presently the ground began to look lighter colored. Something fluttered about his head and settled on his eyelashes. He winked and sneezed and squeaked to the other babies. They had never seen a snowstorm before.

When they jumped into the pond to paddle home something sharp and brittle cracked and snapped in the icy black water. One of the little fellows caught a bit in his mouth. It smarted on his tongue and then it was gone. It was the first time that he had ever tasted ice.

The next night, when the beavers swam to the top of the pond, they bumped their heads against something hard. It cracked all around them. They pushed on, with the water lapping at the jagged edges. After they reached the shore they found it very tiresome to wade through the snow. Before the night was quarter past the old father hurried back to the pond. He was afraid that the ice might freeze too thick for them to break their way home again. He arched his back and slapped his tail on the water with an echoing whack to call the babies after him.

All winter long the beavers lived quietly in their little homes under the snow. Most of the time they slept, each on his own soft bed in the dark. Whenever they were hungry they paddled down the tunnel which led to the woodpile. Gnawing off some sticks they

swam back with the bundles under their chins. They used the middle of the room for a dining-table. There they nibbled the bark. Then they carried the peeled sticks back into the pond. They did not like to have rubbish left on the floor.

Sometimes the babies grew restless and tired of staying still in the room. They swam out into the pond and moved about under the ice. They hunted for roots of the yellow water-lily. It must have been hard to hold their breaths long enough to dig up the roots and paddle away back into the house. Once the biggest baby almost had a fight with one of his playmates over a juicy root. They pulled at it so roughly that it was torn to pieces.

So the winter months slipped away. At last spring melted the ice on the pond. Here and there in the black water little brown heads came popping up. They went plowing toward shore, leaving v-shaped ripples stretching out behind. Up the banks scrambled the beavers, — mother beavers and father beavers, big brother beavers and big sister beavers, and all the little beavers who had been babies the year before.

Away roamed the fathers up the brook, to have a good time travelling all summer long. The grown-up brothers and sisters started out to build dams and houses of their own. The little fellows wandered into the woods to find their dinners of tender buds and twigs. The mothers ate the bark from fresh sticks, and then hurried back to carry milk to the new baby beavers, asleep on their soft beds at home.

VII

THE RABBIT (HARE)

"THE TIMID ONE"

THE TIMID ONE

THE nest was a small hole scooped out of the turf and lined with bits of fur from the mother bunny's breast. The five baby bunnies lay packed close together. Their long ears were pressed flat on their furry backs, and their hind-legs were doubled up under their round, little soft bodies.

Over them rested a blanket of dry grass and fur matted together. The sunlight outside shone through tiny holes here and there. Once the bravest bunny poked up the cover and tried to look out. All he could see was a little roof of green grasses interlacing above the nest. The grasses rustled in the summer breeze.

During the day the babies cuddled down fast asleep. Sometimes a red ant wandered into the nest. It clambered down from wisp to wisp of dead grass and scurried across the bunnies' faces. That tickled so that they screwed up their pink noses and opened their round bright eyes for a drowsy minute. Once

a big spider crawled upon the edge and stared at them with all its eyes, till the bravest bunny scared it away with a flap of his ears. Another time a bird flew down to the nest and pecked at the blanket till its bill stuck through and almost pricked one of the babies.

Toward evening the bunnies began to wake up for the night. They squirmed about, curling their toes, stretching their long legs, and cocking their ears to listen for the mother bunny's step. At last they heard the soft thump-thump-thump of her furry paws as she came leaping over the grass from the bushes where she had been dozing. How joyfully the babies wriggled at sight of her! As soon as she had lifted the blanket and crept underneath they snuggled close to her. They were hungry for the warm milk which she had always ready for them to drink.

As the days passed the little bunnies began to grow too big for the nest. Their hind-legs felt stronger and stronger for jumping. Indeed, the bravest bunny had a naughty way of kicking his brothers and sisters. He set his heels against their soft sides and pushed in hard jerks, for the fun of making them squirm

and squeal. Sometimes they kicked back, but not very often, because they were afraid to make much noise.

Their mother taught them to be as still as they could while she was absent. The only way for such helpless little creatures to escape being eaten by their many enemies was to keep out of sight. Snakes would not notice them if they stayed quiet in the nest. Hungry hawks and owls could not find out where they were hidden if they did not move. The bit of a blanket looked like a patch of dead grass. Foxes and wild-cats and the rest could not smell them so long as they lay still.

They were timid little things, and their ears seemed to be always twitching to catch the least sounds. On some warm afternoons they woke up early, and waited for the mother to bring their supper of milk. Outside they heard the plop of grasshoppers jumping from stem to stalk. The flutter of butterflies and the buzzing of bees over the clover-blossoms sounded loud enough. The shrill whirring of a locust made them tremble and quake. Perhaps they were afraid that it was something coming to eat them up.

When the bunnies were strong enough to leave the nest they went to live in the brush with their mother. Away they all galloped over the grass. Their long ears flapped up and down, and the furry soles of their hind-legs twinkled behind them. They did not stop to look around till they were safe in the shelter of the bushes. Then every one of them turned, and sat up on his haunches with his little fore-paws in the air. With their ears pointed forward, and their round eyes shining, they looked back at the grassy spot where they had lived in the hidden cosy nest.

At that very minute, when they were all so excited and happy, the old mother caught sight of a fox stealing after them. At a sign from her the little bunnies sat as still as if they were made of stone. They were almost the same color as the sticks and dry leaves around them. Nobody would notice them unless they should move.

But that sly old fox was not looking for them with his eyes; he was following their tracks, with his nose close to the ground. He smelled his way nearer and nearer. The trembling babies could see the sharp white

teeth between his lips. His narrow eyes gleamed hungrily. Finally he crept so near that he could smell them in the air. They saw him lift his head and snuff in their direction, one of his fore-paws raised for the next step.

Suddenly the mother bunny sprang out before his face and darted off helter-skelter into the woods. She wanted to lead the fox away from her little ones. Away she dashed under the bushes and over the logs, up slopes and down gullies, dodging now this way now that. Once he was so close that he opened his jaws to seize her. At that she turned like a flash, and ran right between his legs. Then into a swamp she went bounding in great leaps. There the fox lost sight of her, and could not find her scent in the water. She left him nosing hungrily back and forth, while she hurried back to her babies. They were sitting as still as stones just where she had told them to stay.

Almost the first thing the mother bunny did, after gathering her family in the woods, was to find different holes for hiding-places. One hole was in a hollow stump, and another was in an old woodchuck-burrow. She told the

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little ones that they must not go near the holes, except when they could not escape in any other way. If they went often they would make a path, and then their enemies could find out their hiding-places.

It was pleasant there in the underbrush of the woods. They felt almost safe with briers above them to keep away their hungry enemies. The smell of the mossy earth was warm and sweet. The buds and leaves and bark were spicy and fragrant. The bunnies sniffed hither and thither, twitching their noses and jerking their ears.

When they stopped living on milk they learned to feed on grasses and juicy roots and twigs. The old mother showed them what was good to eat. Like the beavers and squirrels the bunnies belonged to the *Order of Gnawers.* Each one had four little nibbling teeth in the front of his mouth, and grinding teeth in the back. They did not have such strong teeth as the beavers, who could cut down trees, or the squirrels, who gnawed hard nuts.

Though the bunnies could not fight well, because they had no sharp claws and teeth,

THE RABBIT.

"It was pleasant there in the underbrush of the woods." *Page* 100.

they could jump higher and farther and faster than any of their cousins. They soon found out that the best way to escape when chased by their enemies was to trust in the nimbleness of their legs.

Of course when they saw any hungry animal looking for something to eat it was best for them to lie perfectly still so as to avoid being seen. But if the animal caught sight of them they must run and dodge and double and hide for their lives. It was generally wiser to keep on running till the other lost the scent rather than to creep into a hole. If the hungry hunter happened to be a mink or a weasel he could crawl in after them and kill them.

The bunnies did not try to dig their own holes. They were really hares, though they were so much like rabbits, who were true burrowers. Once in the woods the bravest bunny saw a true rabbit. This rabbit had a family of little ones in a deep burrow. They had been born blind and naked, but the little hares had been born with their eyes open and fur on their bodies. True rabbits were brought to America from across the sea.

In spite of their dangerous adventures the bunnies enjoyed the long summer. Every morning at earliest dawn up they hopped from the forms. The spot of flattened grass where each furry body had been resting was called a "form." Away to the clover-field they went leaping, one by one. There they drank the dewdrops, and ate a breakfast of sweet green leaves. They took a nibble here and a nibble there. Then they sat up on their haunches and looked around to spy out a possible enemy. Their round eyes twinkled this way and that, and their long ears twitched nervously at every sound.

The twittering of the birds did not frighten them. They seemed to know that there was no danger-signal in the rustling of leaves on the trees, or the splashing of frogs in the pond. Even the crackle of twigs under the footsteps of a deer did not send them running. They must have known that grass-eating animals would not harm them.

But the stealthy wriggling of a snake in the grass sent them scurrying wildly into the thickest underbrush. When they heard a stick crack under the trees they seemed to know at

once what kind of animal was creeping near. At the soft tread of a fox or a wild-cat they sat as still as stones, unless they knew that they had been seen. If that happened they bounded away in a race for life.

When the sunshine fell bright on some sandy hillside the bunnies went there, and stretched out like kittens in the pleasant warmth. They squirmed and blinked and turned slowly over and over. They lay on their backs and waved their paws in the air. They had five toes on each fore-paw and four on each hind-paw. Even then, while twisting and stretching in enjoyment, they were on the alert. At the sound of a caw from a neighboring tree, or at the sight of a hawk hovering far above, they all leapt to their feet, and scampered out of sight in a twinkling.

Then for hours they sat on their forms in the shade of the bushes and dozed, half asleep, but ready to bound away at the first hint of danger. The scream of a blue jay startled every bunny wide awake in an instant. The jays always saw everything in the woods. The bunnies waited, without stirring, till they could find out what the trouble was. Sometimes it

was a dog hunting for rabbits; sometimes it was a snake coiled in the sun, or a baby fox playing with his own tail; sometimes it was only a red squirrel chattering and scolding at the blue jay.

On warm afternoons the winged ticks hovered about, biting the bunnies on the tips of their ears and sensitive noses. Then the bunnies hid under skunk cabbages in the marshy spots. The bad smell kept the ticks away. It was cool and pleasant there. The five babies lay still, listening to the soft whirring and drowsy buzzing of insects, in the hot sunshine beyond the marsh.

After the sun went down the bunnies scattered to find their supper of tender twigs or grasses or roots. Always, while they nibbled, they kept twitching their ears forward and back. Every minute or two each one paused to sit erect, and roll his bright eyes in all directions. All the time his little jaws were working busily. Then perhaps they dressed their fur coats, combing their ears with their paws, and biting the burrs from their vests and socks.

Off with a hop, skip, and jump for a frolic in an open space in the woods! What a gay

time the five little bunnies had there with their friends! They went leaping, one after another. Some tore through the ferns and hopped over the logs, with their long ears flapping. They sprang straight up into the air, kicking out their hind-legs. They jumped over each other, and scurried wildly round and round. One whirled about like a kitten, chasing his own short tail. The bravest bunny danced on his hind-legs all alone in the moonlight.

When summer was over the cool days of autumn found the bunnies friskier than ever. They had half a dozen smaller brothers and sisters by this time, because the old mother had two or three nestfuls of little ones in a year. There was plenty for everybody to eat in the woods and fields. The little creatures feasted on roots and apples and soft-shelled nuts till they grew round and sleek. The bravest bunny became so fat and lazy that he hated to run. Whenever he was being chased by any enemy he slipped into the first hole he saw. He would certainly have been caught one day if the weasel behind him had not happened to have a lame foot from his last

fight. When he stopped to untangle it from a strawberry-vine the bunny had time to escape.

Winter was hard on the bunny family. They could not run so fast through the soft snow as on the firm ground. Their enemies could see their footprints, and follow more easily. Often and often, when a little fellow had gone out to nibble twigs and buds, he heard something move behind him. And there, not far away, he saw a fox ready to spring on him.

The bravest bunny slept under a rotten log. He always slept with his legs doubled under him, fixed for a great jump away, in case any hungry animal came nosing around. He did not mind the cold, for his fur was fine and thick and warm. Even inside his mouth the soft fur grew, as well as on the soles of his feet.

When spring came the bunnies were more glad than any of the other small creatures in the woods. It was a joy to feel the warm breezes blow their fur. They did not care so much for the warmth as for the tender buds which it opened on the trees. Green leaves

came peeping out of the ground, and flowers blossomed in sheltered nooks.

Birds were singing, and frogs began their croaking in the meadows. The woods were busy with the hurry-skurry of little feet. Now once more there was plenty for everybody to eat. The bunnies were glad because of that. But perhaps they were even more glad, because now their hungry enemies could hunt many other animals besides the timid bunnies.

VIII

THE SQUIRREL

"THE ONE WITH THE PRETTIEST TAIL"

THE ONE WITH THE PRETTIEST TAIL

THE four baby squirrels were tired of staying in their soft nest in the hollow tree. They wanted to find out what was going on in the world outside. As they cuddled together in the shadowy hole they could hear the queerest sounds. They cocked their heads curiously at the rustling and whispering of the wind among the leaves. They heard chirping and singing and a silvery tinkle, tinkle from the brook. Once a bee flew buzzing right over their heads, and made them clutch one another in terror.

One morning, when the old mother squirrel was away hunting for birds' eggs to eat, the smallest baby crept to the mouth of the hole and peeped out with his round bright eyes. All around and above him there were wonderful green things flickering and fluttering. Twinkles of sunlight danced through the leaves and dazzled him. Something soft and cool blew back the new bristles on his lips and

ruffled his satiny red fur. He was so much interested that he sat there, staring and staring, till the other little ones began to squeak and scold him for shutting out the light.

After he crept down again to the nest the others climbed up, one by one, and looked out. They winked and blinked at each wonderful sight; they sniffed the strange odors, and twitched their eager little heads at every new sound. The scream of a blue jay in the tree-top above sent them scampering inside again, to cuddle close together in the darkest corner. It was fun to see something new and exciting, even if it did make them shiver all over.

Soon the mother squirrel came springing from branch to branch to reach the hollow. How the babies squeaked and chattered in welcome! Very likely they told her about the wonderful sights and sounds and smells in the strange world outside the hole. The smallest one clasped his fore-paws around her neck, and coaxed her to let them all go out to find more interesting things. It was stupid there in the dark nest, with nothing to watch except the patch of light across the opening above them.

The old squirrel knew that the little ones were not strong enough yet to leave the nest. To be sure, they had grown and changed very much since the first days. Then they had been ugly little creatures, like tiny pug-dogs, with big heads, no fur, and their eyes tight shut. Now they were half as big as she was herself. Their eyes were like jewels, and their red fur was smooth as satin.

But their tails, with only fringes of hair along the sides, were not nearly so fluffy as the mother's. Her tail was long and plumy. It curved so gracefully over her back that she seemed to be sitting in its shadow. One name of the squirrel is "shadow-tail."

For a few weeks longer the four babies scrambled about the doorway and looked longingly out at the wonderful green tree-world. They did not dare to step out upon the slender branches, for fear of falling off. It made them feel dizzy to look away down to the ground below. They did not know how to cling to the limbs with their feet while they balanced themselves with their tails.

When the young squirrels were almost strong enough to learn to run and climb in

the tree, the mother began to build an airier home higher up the trunk. The old nest was growing too warm for comfort, as summer brought the long sunny hours. The squirrel father was not there to help his mate. She had driven him away before the babies came. She thought the tree belonged to her, and that she needed all the room in the hollow for her little ones. She chased him off to live in the woods with all the other squirrel fathers till the babies were big enough to take care of themselves.

The mother squirrel worked on the new nest in the early morning. She bit off leafy twigs and carried them to the top of the tree. There, where two branches forked, she packed the sticks and leaves together in a loose ball. Then she pushed a doorway through, at one side or another, just as she happened to be standing. This was not such a neat home as one in the next tree. That other mother squirrel built her new nest of strips of bark tied together with ribbons of soft fibre. Over the doorway she hung a curtain of bark, and lifted it up carefully whenever she went inside.

At last the new home was ready. The old mother hurried down to the hollow and called the babies to come out and follow her. They stepped out, one after another, just as carefully as they could. The smallest baby came last. He dug his claws into the bark and hung on. The branch seemed so narrow that he trembled from fear of falling. The tree swayed in the wind. The branch bounced up and down, and a leaf blew in his face. The poor little fellow shut his eyes, because everything seemed to be whirling round and round.

When he opened his eyes again he saw the three other little ones climbing up the trunk above him. They clutched the bark with their claws and moved forward, one paw at a time. The mother was running on ahead of them. Every few steps she turned around to coax them on faster.

Finally they reached a narrow branch which led over to the new nest. They crawled out on it, lifting one foot and then setting it down before lifting another. The farther they crept the narrower the branch grew under them. Their little paws began to slip over the smoother bark. The one in front

tried to turn around, but he was afraid of losing his balance. So they all three scrambled backwards to the safe trunk.

The mother ran back to them, and chattered and scolded. Again and again they started out over the branch, and then went scrambling back. When at last the mother had coaxed them across to the nest she looked around for the smallest baby. There he was away down at the door of the old nest. The old squirrel was tired out. Her fur was ruffled and her ears drooped. She ran down to the nest and began to scold the little fellow. He sat up and put his paws around her neck, as if he were begging her to let him stay there. But she started him up the trunk and pushed him along to the branch. Then she took hold of him by the neck and carried him across to the new home.

After that the little ones were taken out every morning to practise climbing. Little by little they learned to balance themselves on the branches. Their tails were fluffy enough by this time to be of use in balancing. First to one side, then to the other, each baby tilted his tail as he crept along, step by step. Every

day they could move a little faster. Finally they were able to chase one another up and down, from branch to branch. They went running around the trunks, skipping and leaping from slender twig to twig, and jumping from one tree to another, even through the air.

Sometimes one or another missed his footing after a reckless jump. Often he caught hold of a branch below by a single toe and lifted himself up to a firmer foothold. Or if there was no branch within reach, he spread out his fur, and flattened his tail, and went sailing down to the ground, almost as if he could fly. They never seemed to get hurt.

The little squirrels appeared to be always doing something. They turned summersaults in the grass, or swung by one paw from the tip of a tough branch. There was always something to do or to see. Now they chattered at a blue jay, or chased a toad for the fun of watching him hop. Now they caught beetles to look at, or, safe in a tree, they scolded at some fox slinking along through the woods. And every day there was the excitement of finding something to eat.

The babies lived on milk till they were almost as heavy as their mother. Then she began to feed them with fruit and buds and grubs, which she first chewed for them. Like the beavers and the hares and rabbits each had four chisel teeth in the front of its mouth. They needed to gnaw hard nuts or bark every day to keep these teeth from growing too long.

When the young squirrels were three months old in July they were big enough to take care of themselves. Away they scampered from the old home tree and found new homes in stumps and hollows. The smallest one used to curl up in an old robin's nest to sleep at night. All day long they were just as busy as they could be.

There were cones to be gathered from the evergreens. The little squirrels ran up the trees in a hurry, and, cutting off the cones with their sharp teeth, tossed them over their shoulders to the ground. Every few minutes they scurried down to bury the cones under the pine-needles for the winter. Sometimes a drop of sticky pitch from the cut stems was rubbed against their fur. That made them

so uncomfortable that they had to stop and lick it off.

The squirrels loved to be clean. Ever since they were tiny babies, with their new red fur, they always helped one another with washing their faces, and combing their tails with their claws. They were careful to run along logs over a muddy spot. If one happened to get wet he dried himself with his fluffy tail.

When they were tired of eating seeds and twigs they hunted for grubs. Clinging to the bark of a dead tree they listened till they heard something gnawing beneath the surface ever so softly. Then, tearing off the bark in ragged pieces, they pounced upon the flat whitish grub beneath and ate it up. They were fond of mushrooms, too, and seemed to know which were poisonous and which were good to eat.

But the best time of all came in the autumn when nuts were ripe. Then what fun the little squirrels had! Early every morning out popped the little heads from the hollow stumps and logs. The big round eyes twinkled eagerly in every direction. Then, whisk! they were out, with a bark and

a squeak! Scampering to the top of a tree each one took a flying leap to a branch of the next. Up and down, on and across, they followed the squirrel-paths through the woods till they reached the grove, where the nuts were ripening.

It was a busy place, with little wings fluttering and little feet pattering, and yellow leaves drifting down in the sunshine. All the squirrels scurried to and fro, picking one nut here, and another there. They sat on the branches, with their bushy tails curving over their backs, and held the nuts in their forepaws to nibble. The smallest baby could open the hardest walnut, and clean it out in less than a minute. In the oddest way he seemed to know exactly where to bore through the shell so as to strike the broad side of the kernel.

All the while the blue jays and the thrifty chipmunks were gathering nuts and corn, and hiding their stores away for the winter. That seemed so interesting that the squirrels gathered some too. The smallest one stuffed his cheeks full of nuts and scampered back to his latest home in a hollow stump. The next mouthful he brought was hidden in a fork

of a tree and covered with leaves. Then he tucked away a few chestnuts in the cracks of the bark on an oak-tree. By that time he was tired of working at this, so he scurried around to find out how many nuts the other young squirrels were saving for the winter.

Autumn passed away, and the days grew colder. In the woods the leaves were all fallen and the branches were stripped bare of nuts. Every morning when the squirrels poked out their heads the air nipped their noses. Frost sparkled on the dead grass. The chipmunks had crept into their holes for the winter, and most of the birds had flown away south.

The squirrels were not quite so gay now as in the autumn days, when they danced upon the branches and whistled and chuckled over the good things to eat and the curious sights to see. They slept with their warm tails wrapped over their noses. They still ran busily through the tree-tops, except when snow or icy rain kept them shut within their holes. They ate all the nuts they could find, and dug up the buried pine-cones. They climbed the hemlock-trees and ate the seeds. Sometimes they found a delicious frozen apple

or some forgotten acorns. Once the smallest squirrel happened to dig up a heap of chestnuts from between two stones under the snow. He could not remember whether he had hidden them himself or not. How he snickered and danced when he saw them!

Late in the winter the squirrels had eaten all the nuts and cones within reach. They were so hungry on many a day that they tried to creep into a chipmunk's hole and steal his store of food. However he was smaller than they were, and he had wisely made one bend in his tunnel too small for them to pass. Then they had to live on buds and barks and seeds as best they could till spring started the tender green plants to growing.

The squirrels gnawed the bark of the maple-trees and drank the sweet sap that came oozing out. Later there were elm buds to nibble and birds' eggs to suck. The woods were once more green with juicy leaves. All the squirrels went to housekeeping. Soon in almost every tree there was a new family of wondering little squirrels peeping out of their hollow with their round, bright eyes.

IX

THE BEAR

"ONE THAT SLEEPS ALL WINTER"

ONE THAT SLEEPS ALL WINTER

OUT in the woods the snow fell deeper and deeper. It piled higher and higher around the hollow tree in which the mother bear and her two little bears were sleeping. The snow had drifted over the opening and made it all dark inside.

Once in a while the two babies woke up and whimpered for more milk, as they tumbled clumsily about on the bed of leaves. Then the old bear opened her sleepy eyes and licked their glossy little black bodies while she nursed them. After that they all fell drowsily quiet again, and slept and slept.

So the weeks slipped away while the babies sucked milk, or slept, snuggled close to their big, warm, furry mother. She had been sleeping all winter. The autumn before she had crept into the hollow tree to stay until spring. She did not eat a mouthful in all that time.

Now as the days grew warmer outside the old mother bear began to feel more wide awake. One morning she pawed a hole

through the snow at the opening of the hollow and crawled out to find something to eat. The two little bears had their eyes open at last. They lay still on the nest and blinked at the light that shone dimly in through the hole.

Now and then they heard the soft plop of a bunch of snow dropping from the evergreen trees in the woods. The bare branches of the aspens clicked together in the March wind. They heard the gurgle of water lapping over melting ice. The tap-tap-tap of a woodpecker on the bark of their hollow tree sounded like thunder inside. Once a red squirrel ran squeaking over the snow outside.

Before very long they heard footsteps thumping softly up to the hole, and their mother's big black body came scrambling in. The two cubs whined for joy, and rubbed against her legs. They were hungry again, and wanted their dinner. The thin old bear had not found much to eat herself. It was too early in the year for berries, and the ants were still in their underground homes. She had caught a frog in the brook, and found a few blades of grass to munch.

After that she went out every day, for it

seemed as if she grew hungrier and hungrier. Once she found a frozen deer. After eating all she could of it she covered the rest with leaves until the next day. Sometimes she caught a chipmunk under a log. It was only in the early spring that the old black bear ate much meat, for usually she liked fruit and roots and nuts better.

Meanwhile the two little bears stayed safe in the den till their teeth were cut and the claws grew sharp and strong. Then they played outside for a little every day. They wrestled together and tumbled about in the sunshine, like clumsy puppies. They were careful not to creep too far away from the den. At any strange sound or smell away they scampered head first into the hole, with their little wrinkled black feet kicking out behind them.

At last they were strong enough to set out on their travels with the old mother. Very likely she gave them each a good washing and combing before they started. She could use her fore-paws like hands. When the cubs squealed and tried to bite, while she was brushing them, she slapped them with her big paw.

She could use her paws for digging, and for carrying food to her mouth. With the sharp claws she could tear meat or logs to pieces.

The two little ones must have been delighted to think of leaving the tiresome den in the hollow tree. Like all bears they loved to travel. Down the valley they ambled, stepping clumsily on the flat soles of their feet. Bears do not walk lightly on their toes, as do the graceful animals who belong to the cat family.

The old mother moved on with her head held low, while the babies waddled after her. They did not look around much at the wonderful mountains, with the dark evergreens and rocks scattered over the yellow gravel. They did not notice the blue sky above, for their close-set eyes were rather nearsighted. Though they could not see very well they sniffed keenly at every strange smell.

There were many new delicious smells of warm earth and green plants and furry rabbits and squirrels and birds and strawberry blossoms. The cubs imitated their mother in everything she did. They stepped in the same foot-tracks, and jumped over the same

logs at the same places. Whenever she stopped to sniff they rose on their little hind-legs and twitched their pointed brown noses in the air.

Once they came to a footprint in the gravel. It was a footprint of a grizzly bear ever so much bigger than the old black bear. The cubs looked at their mother to see how she was acting. Then they copied her. They drew back their lips from their white teeth and growled baby growls, while their little eyes gleamed, and the hairs on their backs ruffled up stiffly. Grizzlies sometimes killed black bears.

Soon they reached the spruce grove where the red ants lived. Scattered over the gravel there were rounded hills, with tiny red creatures hurrying in and out of their holes, and around and to and fro. The little bears looked at the ants and then watched their mother as she sat down beside a hill and licked up a mouthful. After a minute down they sat, and scraped their pointed tongues over the ant-hills.

The ants tasted as sour as vinegar, and made the young ones wrinkle their noses just at first, because they were used to drinking sweet milk.

More than once a fierce little ant gave a nipping bite to the red tongues that squirmed over the gravel. That made the babies squeal, and rub their mouths with their paws. When some ants crawled up on their fur the bears licked them off without getting any gravel mixed in.

As the morning sunshine grew warmer the cubs began to feel tired and sleepy. It had been such an exciting day ever since starting out from the old den at sunrise! The mother walked off to a shady spot under thick evergreens, and they all curled down for a nap. The babies snuggled close together, curling their paws and tucking their noses into their fur. Closing their eyes, while their fat little sides heaved in a long sigh of content, they fell fast asleep. Those ants had tasted so good!

Very early every morning the two cubs set off with their mother to find something to eat. In the heat of the day they took a nap. Late in the afternoon they went out again and feasted till dark, or even later, when berries were plenty. Sometimes they slept in a hollow log, or in a cave, or in a sheltered thicket.

Before lying down the old bear was always careful to walk several hundred yards in the same direction in which the wind was blowing. If any enemy happened to follow their trail while they were asleep they could smell him in the wind and get away in time. One night they really did smell a wolf coming nearer and nearer. They stole off through the woods. The old mother showed the cubs how to step softly, setting down each big padded foot where it broke no stick and rustled no leaf.

The bears learned to eat all sorts of food. There were the delightfully sour ants in their hills or hidden under rocks and old logs. The cubs soon grew strong enough to turn over the rocks and logs for themselves. Leaning on one fore-leg, each little fellow raised the stone with the other fore-leg, and gave it a shove backward, so that it would not fall on his toes. Away rolled the stone, and down went the greedy head to lick up every ant in sight. Then a sweep of a paw uncovered the beetles and worms and crickets that had run to hide deeper. Sometimes the old mother gripped her claws in both sides of a rotten log and tore it open. The little bears gobbled

up the worms and insects inside as fast as they could.

All the spring and early summer the three bears hunted for worms and insects in this way. They dug up wild roots with their noses, just as pigs do. One day the cubs smelled a delicious smell near a flat stone. They hurried to push the stone away, and there they found a heap of nuts. They stuffed their mouths full at once, while the little chipmunk, to whom the nuts belonged, squeaked angrily at them from under a heavy rock.

Later in the summer the berries were ripe. That was the time for little bears to be happy! First the fragrant red strawberries grew red in the fields. The berries were so small, and the hungry mouths were so large, that many a bite was mixed with leaves and grass. However, the cubs did not object to that, even when a fat white grub or two was pulled up with the roots of the strawberry plants.

After the strawberries other berries ripened along the bank of the river at the edge of the woods. The mother bear knew just where the biggest ones grew. Many a happy day they

spent picking the fruit. When the weather was cloudy and cool they did not stop for naps. Each one walked along from bush to bush, raising his head and wrapping his tongue around a branch. Then with a downward pull he stripped off leaves and berries and all, and munched and munched. They could stand on their hind-feet to reach the higher branches.

The bears had broad grinding teeth in the sides of their jaws, and so they could chew their food. Animals like the cat and the dog have only cutting teeth. They tear their food into pieces small enough to swallow, and then gulp it down without chewing.

At noon they went down to the river for a drink. First they snuffed around carefully, and then lapped up the water. If the day was very warm the cubs waded in and lay down to cool off. Sometimes the old mother took her nap lying in the water. Once in a while they caught a frog or a live fish by giving a jump and quick slap before it could swim away.

In late summer the wild plums ripened in the woods. The old bear shook the trees and sent the red fruit hailing down upon the

scrambling cubs. On one specially delightful day they found a hollow tree in which bees had been storing honey for the winter.

They saw the bees buzzing around a hole high up on the trunk. One of the cubs climbed up. Wrapping his hind-legs around the tree he held on with one fore-paw, while with the other he dipped out the honey and stuffed it into his mouth. All about him the air was gray with bees. They stung him on his nose and ears and eyelids. He did not mind that much, except when one bit his tongue. Then he thrust out his tongue and mumbled and growled for a moment. He had never before eaten anything so delicious as honey.

After the pleasant summer came the frosty autumn with its ripening nuts. The cubs climbed trees and sat on the branches, with their black legs dangling. The old bear shook the trees to bring down the nuts. Once she shook so hard that one of the little bears lost his hold and fell. He tumbled down in such a limp soft heap that he was not hurt at all, but bounded up again like a rubber ball.

At another time the mother saw a big grizzly bear coming through the woods. When the cubs heard her warning grunt they shot up the tree like jumping-jacks, and hid in the thick leaves near the top. There they were safe, for the grizzly was too heavy, and its claws were too long, for climbing. Grizzly bears are the largest beasts of prey in the world. Sometimes when very hungry they will eat their cousins, the black bears.

The days kept growing colder little by little, and twilight came a few minutes sooner every evening. The air was frosty at night, and somehow the three bears felt drowsier and drowsier. Their naps lasted longer every afternoon. On some cold days they curled up on dry ledges in the sunshine and slept from morning to night. They were sleek and fat from their feasts of acorns and nuts.

All this while the old mother bear was becoming more and more cross. When the cubs tried to play with her she slapped them, and pushed them away whimpering. It was time for them to take care of themselves. Very likely she did not want to be bothered with them all winter long.

So one day the two little bears walked off by themselves. They roamed through the woods, looking for some place which would be a warm den. One of them dug a cosy hole under a big root and curled down for his winter's sleep. The other crept between two rocks that almost touched over his head.

Outside the snow began to fall. It blew in through the cracks and powdered down upon the little bear's thick fur. Very soon it had stuffed all the cracks and drifted higher over the rocks and logs. It went whirling from the ledges into the valleys; it fell deeper and deeper over the three dens and shut out the cold.

The little bears breathed more and more slowly, with their noses warm in their furry fore-arms. Their little fat sides rose and fell ever so faintly. Their hearts beat more softly. They were fast asleep for the winter, while the snow fell and the icy winds blew on the mountains without.

X

THE FOX

"THE WISEST ONE"

THE WISEST ONE

ALMOST the first thing that the smallest baby fox remembered was being carried in his mother's mouth from one den to another. His woolly little red body hung limp between her long white teeth. That was the safest way; for if he had held stiff or wriggled she might have closed her jaws tighter and pinched him.

It was very early in the morning, and the rising sun was just lighting up the tops of the trees. The birds were singing their gayest May songs. Here and there dewdrops sparkled, where the level sunbeams glinted across the leaves. Under a bush a rabbit sat up very still, and stared with round, frightened eyes at the mother fox.

The mother fox did not see the rabbit. She stepped along swiftly. Her slender paws hardly rustled a leaf or snapped a twig. She looked like a graceful red dog, with pointed ears and yellow eyes and beautiful plumy tail.

This plumy tail seemed to float out in the air behind her, as if she were blowing lightly before the wind.

When she reached the new den she did not stop an instant at the front door. The freshly dug earth was scattered around there in plain sight. In digging this new burrow she and the father fox had left the dirt there on purpose, to make their enemies think that this hole was the real entrance to the den. A few feet underground they had closed the tunnel with a heap of earth. At the other end they had made a new opening hidden behind gray rocks in a thicket.

To this secret door the mother fox carried the baby, and set him down on his four thick legs. He looked like a little red lamb with yellow eyes. Into the hole he scrambled, and crept through the tunnel to the dark den at the end. On the nest of leaves inside he found his four brothers and sisters snuggling together. The old mother had carried them there one by one.

The day before, when a big dog came nosing about the old den, the father fox led him away through the woods. He could run the

faster, and so he kept on, with the dog chasing him, till the dog was tired out. Then he and the mother hurried to dig this new den and move the babies before the dog came back to the old place again.

In going from one den to the other the old foxes were careful not to walk in a straight path. If they did that of course the dog could follow them by smelling their trail. They took a roundabout path every time. They trotted around a swampy meadow and crossed a brook by stepping from stone to stone. The wet ground hid the scent of their paws.

This journey to the new den was the first time that the young foxes had been outdoors. As they were carried by the neck they could not twist their heads around to see very much. But still, they must have enjoyed the light and the fresh air. They did not want to keep on staying all the time in the dark den. So early one morning they came scrambling out after their mother.

The smallest baby fox crawled out last of all. For a moment he stood very quiet on all four paws. Then he sat down and cocked

his little head on one side while he looked around. The old father was lying down in the sunlight just outside the thicket. Two of the babies trotted over to him and began to play with his tail. Two others climbed upon the mother's back and pushed each other off. There they wrestled, rolling over and over in each other's paws.

The smallest baby wanted to make the others pay him some attention. He lifted his sharp little black nose and opened his mouth and began to bark — bow-wow-wow, bow-wow-wow — till the others stopped playing. They came running over to ask what was the matter. He told them something in the fox language by rubbing his cool wet nose against theirs. Then they all five trotted about and explored the thicket by smelling of everything within reach.

They poked their noses into the grass and against the trees and bushes and over every stick and stone and leaf on the ground. To their keen nostrils everything had a different smell. When the smallest baby smelled a stick he could tell which little brother or sister had been smelling it just before him.

As the sun rose higher and the air grew warmer the little fellows sat down and rested, with their tongues lolling out of their mouths. Like all foxes and wolves and dogs they perspired through the tongue and the soles of their feet. After a while the mother gave a low growl to say that it was time to go back into the den. In they scampered head first, and curled up for a nap, with their fluffy tails over their noses.

When the babies cut their teeth the mother stopped feeding them with milk. After that she and the father fox were kept busy hunting for food for the hungry young ones. Sometimes they hunted in the daytime as well as at night. Oftener, however, the old mother stayed near the den to keep guard when the little foxes came out to play every afternoon.

Such fun as the five little ones had together! They ran round and round, chasing their tails. One hid behind a tuft of grass and jumped out to scare the others. Another climbed upon a rock and then was afraid to slide down. One went rolling down a small hill while another capered beside him and pretended to snap at him.

Once the smallest baby saw a grasshopper whizz past. He saw where it was hiding under a leaf. He crouched down as low as he could and crept toward it. Without making a noise he crawled from bush to stone, from stone to tuft of weeds, till he was near enough to spring and catch it in his paws. All the others ran to see what he had caught. The mother came, too, from the place where she had been watching him. She was proud of him because he was learning to hunt while so young.

As evening came on and the shadows lengthened under the trees the mother fox sent the babies into the den and walked away to hunt for a supper. The smallest fox happened to be the last one in. He turned when just inside and poked his pointed nose out to watch her as she trotted away into the woods.

A few hours later, when they heard her low call at the mouth of the burrow, out they came tumbling. Sometimes she had a rabbit hanging in her mouth, with its long legs on one side and its long ears on the other. Sometimes she had a young turkey thrown over her shoulders, or a fringe of field-mice hanging by the tails from her lips. Once she brought a wood-

chuck, and at another time a string of little chickens held by the necks.

The babies always ran and snatched for a piece. Then each trotted off alone to eat it. When they were not hungry they played with the food. They nibbled the bits, first tossing them into the air and then springing to catch them. They could not use their fore-paws so freely as animals like the cat. They growled and shook the mice to and fro in their mouths. Sometimes they snatched from one another and snapped and snarled crossly. Once the smallest fox had a fight. Every time he flew at his brother the other whisked his bushy tail in front of his face, and all the little one got was a mouthful of fur.

By and by the young foxes were taken out to learn to hunt for themselves. There was ever so much to learn because every different animal must be hunted in a different way. The main lesson was to keep their eyes open and their ears alert and their noses keen for smelling. They must be quick to jump and wise at all sorts of tricks.

They learned to catch chickens by hiding near the place where the flock was feeding.

When a chicken strayed near enough quick as a flash out jumped the fox and caught it by the neck. They chased rabbits and pounced on busy squirrels. They hunted meadow-mice in the grass, and stole silently upon careless woodchucks.

The smallest baby caught a chipmunk in almost the same way as he had caught the grasshopper. He saw the little brown animal feeding near its hole. Very slowly and carefully the fox began to walk up to it. Every few moments the chipmunk sat up and looked around. When he did this the fox stood still, and so the chipmunk did not notice him. As soon as the chipmunk dropped down on all four feet and began to nibble again, the young hunter crept several steps closer. He held his tail pointing out straight behind. At last, with a rush and a jump, the fox had the chipmunk between his teeth.

All summer long there was plenty to eat in the woods. The five young foxes grew as strong and tall as their parents. They left the old home and scattered to dig new dens here and there in the woods and fields. They all knew how to take care of themselves.

THE FOX.

"Now and then the fox stopped to listen." *Page* 147.

Even as babies they had learned to hold still as a stone at any strange sound. If they heard it again they ran to the den as fast as they could scamper. More than once while they lay blinking comfortably in the sunlight they saw the old father fox spring up with his ears pricked forward and his eyes gleaming. With his tail erect, his fore-feet planted in front, and his hind-feet on the spring, he listened to the sound that had startled him. Perhaps it was the bark of a dog or the scream of a blue jay over a newcomer in the woods. It was always safer for grown foxes to run from an enemy than to try to fight, for they were swift-footed creatures.

Once the smallest fox was really chased by a dog. The dog smelled his trail near a flock of chickens. He ran on with his nose to the ground till he saw the fox sitting under a tree with his tongue hanging out of his mouth. At the sound of the bark the fox looked back. Then off and away he ran lightly over the hills and through the fields. His fluffy tail floated in the wind.

Now and then the fox stopped to listen to the baying of the dog far behind him. Two

or three times he whirled around, chasing his tail and capering. He knew that he could run the faster. He picked his way from stone to stone across a brook because he did not like to wet his feet. Then he ran up a tree that had fallen in a slant. He jumped from the end far over to a dead log and scampered across a rocky field. From the top of a hill he looked back and watched the dog trying to find the scent over the brook and around the slanting tree. When he was tired he hid in a hole.

When autumn came the young foxes gathered on many a frosty night for a romp before going to their hunting. They galloped to and fro, jumping over one another and springing from log to log. It was almost the same as if they were puppies again, frisking before the old burrow. They wrestled and rolled and whirled around after their tails. Then away to their silent hunting!

When the snow fell and the cold winds blew life was harder for the foxes. Through the day generally they slept in their dens, with their tails curled over their noses and forepaws. Out they crept at sundown to hunt for

a rabbit or unwary squirrel, to trap a partridge, or snatch a squeaking mouse at the edge of a stone.

Many a night some young fox went home hungry. Often he lay in the snow hour after hour till his legs were stiff, while he waited for a rabbit that stayed safe in its hole. More than once he made a dive into the snow after a partridge, only to see the bird flutter up before his very nose and fly into a tree. Very likely, as he sat looking hungrily up to the branches, he wished that he could climb trees. Undoubtedly the partridges and the squirrels did not wish any such thing.

Before spring came at last the foxes were hungry enough to eat anything. Indeed one day in early March, while the smallest one was roaming through the woods, he happened to spy a garter-snake coiled on a rock in the sunshine. He jumped for it and gulped it down in a hurry. The next day he caught a turtle and a frog. The frog was so stiff and sluggish from its winter's sleep that it could not hop at all.

By that time it seemed that spring was really at hand. As the foxes never ate grass

or leaves they did not care about the fresh green plants and buds through the woods. Nevertheless they knew very well that rabbits liked roots, and squirrels nibbled twigs, and field-mice were hungry for the sprouting seeds. When these small animals came out to eat, the foxes could hunt them more easily than in winter.

Once more the soft winds blew among the branches and the leaves flickered in the sunlight. The birds were singing overhead in the tree-tops. And here and there in the hidden thickets new broods of little red foxes were frisking together at the mouths of the burrows.

XI

THE WOLF

"THE FIERCEST ONE"

THE WOLF.

"It was the father wolf coming in." *Page* 153.

THE FIERCEST ONE

THE old mother wolf came home from her hunting, licking her black lips. Her four woolly babies scrambled out of the den among the rocks, and ran to meet her. They wagged their little tails, and barked joyous baby barks. They rubbed against her legs, and reached up their little faces to kiss her on her cool nose.

After smelling them all over the old wolf lay down beside them in the den to give them their dinner. The strongest little wolf was getting tired of milk. When he had nursed for a few minutes he began to play, climbing up his mother's shaggy back and rolling down again, with his legs waving in the air.

Soon he pricked up his ears at the sound of a footstep outside the den. Then he sniffed the air. Sure enough! It was the father wolf coming in with something furry in his mouth. The cubs ran to smell it. Somehow the smell made the strongest little fellow feel so hungry that he tried to bite it with his new sharp

teeth. He snapped and snarled when the old wolves dragged it away from him.

Very likely this reminded the parents that they must now teach the young ones to eat meat. So on the next evening they left the babies safe asleep in the den and trotted away together. They looked like two fierce dogs, with shaggy gray and black hair, pointed ears, and bushy tails. Their yellow eyes were set more slanting than the eyes of dogs.

They caught a rabbit by taking turns in chasing it till it was tired out. Then they trotted home. At the mouth of the den the mother gave a low call. There was a rustle of woolly bodies over the leaves and grasses of the nest back in the dark. And out tumbled the cubs, wriggling with joy. The father wolf, with his big teeth glittering behind his whiskered lips, tore the rabbit into pieces, and showed the young ones how to eat. Each snapped at his piece, and ran to one side alone to gnaw and pull it into bits small enough to swallow. They did not chew their food, because like other flesh-eating animals, except bears, they did not have any grinding teeth.

After the strongest baby had finished his

piece he tried with a rush and a snap and a snarl to snatch from another little fellow. But the other cub held on tight with his little jaws. Then, growling and rolling his yellow eyes to watch his greedy brother, he dug a hole with his nose in one corner and buried the rest of his piece. He did this without being taught at all. Every wolf that ever lived knew enough to bury his food when he did not want to eat any more.

After their dinner the mother led the babies down the valley to lap water from the brook. It was dark by this time. Stars were twinkling in the sky. The shadowy trees swayed to and fro in the night wind. One little cub sat down on his haunches, pointed his nose at the sky, and howled. The little ones trotted here and there, smelling every stick and stone. The scream of a far-away panther on the mountain made the old wolf growl and bristle the hairs on her back. She hurried back to the den and sent the cubs in to sleep, while she stole off to hunt for her own supper.

In the morning the little wolves crept out to play about in the sunshine. They rolled and tumbled and wrestled in much the same way

as the young foxes. Like the foxes the wolves belonged to the dog family of flesh-eaters. The little wolves were stronger and larger and fiercer than the little foxes. They did not have such bushy tails.

One young wolf found bits of the rabbit's fur. He tossed and worried them, and gnawed so hard that the fur flew in his throat and nose and made him sneeze. Another saw a butterfly, and went plunging after it on his unsteady little legs. He jumped up at it, and opened his mouth to snap at it. He did not try to slap at it, as a little panther might have done, for he could not use his fore-paws like hands so easily as animals of the cat family.

All summer long there was plenty to eat. The deer in the mountains were fattening on the green grass. They could not fight very well then, because their new antlers were too soft. There were flocks of sheep on the plain. The old parent wolves prowled about every night, and often hunted in the daytime. It kept them busy enough to supply the four hungry cubs.

The two hunted together. Sometimes one hid beside a deer trail, while the other chased

the deer nearer and nearer. When the deer passed the spot where the first wolf was hiding he sprang out and caught it from behind. Sometimes they took turns in chasing a deer till it was tired out. The deer could run the faster, but it always lost time by looking around to see how near the wolf was getting. Once in a while one escaped by running into the middle of a patch of cacti. The wolves could not follow there without getting their feet full of thorns. But the deer's tough hoofs protected its feet.

Later in the summer the young wolves were taken out to learn to hunt with their parents. Their legs were so long that they were good runners, though they could not climb or spring very well. The nails on their toes were short and blunt from walking, for they could not be drawn back and so kept sharp, like the claws of animals belonging to the cat family.

The cubs wore thick coats with soft underfur beneath the coarse shaggy hair. Their yellow eyes were keen, and their sensitive noses were quick to catch every smell of the wilderness. Their jaws were strong for snapping, and their many teeth were sharp for biting

and tearing. They could scent the wind and howl when a storm was coming.

About sunset, one summer day, the little wolves followed the old ones away from the den. Down the canyon they trotted silently, winding in and out among the rocks like gray shadows. Far up the mountain-side a flock of wild sheep went leaping away in terror at sight of the wolves.

On the plain below rabbits scurried off, bounding from hillock to hillock. Prairie-dogs dived, squeaking, into their holes. A fox looked around in fright, and dodged into a clump of underbrush. A small herd of buffaloes, on their way to the river, ran close together and stood with their horns outward, while the wolves skulked past.

Perhaps, just at first, it seemed strange to the cubs to see all other animals afraid of their parents. At home the two shaggy old wolves were gentle and warm and soft toward the little ones. They fed them and watched over them and taught them all they knew. The babies whimpered when the old wolves left them alone in the den; and they barked and frisked with joy to see them come home again.

Out here on the plain it was different. The sight or smell of a wolf sent all the timid wild creatures flying in a scramble and hurry-skurry to get safely out of the way. The sound of the hungry howling made them tremble with fear, for they knew what it meant. It meant something shaggy and gray, with gleaming eyes, galloping swiftly nearer and nearer. It meant the glitter of long teeth behind grim black lips. It meant a spring and a snarl and tearing pain, and then a crunching of bones.

The first lesson that the young wolves learned was to take the trail and run it to earth. The father wolf showed them how to do it. He led them over the plain toward a cluster of trees along the river. He lifted his nose and snuffed the air. He smelled something in the wind that was blowing toward him from the woods. It was not the smell of trees or grass or flowers or birds or squirrels. It was the smell of deer.

The four cubs followed the old one as he galloped under the trees. They saw him stop ad go sniffing here and there with his nose to the ground. Yes, he could smell the place

where the slender hoofs had been pressing the grass a few minutes before. He ran on, with his nose to the ground. The others galloped after him, their heads low, their tongues hanging out, their tails held straight behind.

Once the father wolf howled. The young ones looked up for an instant. There, far away in the dusky woods, the deer were bounding lightly over the dead logs. They turned their pretty heads now and then to look back, till they vanished from sight. The wolves kept on for a few miles, learning to pick up the scent on the run. Then they found a half-eaten buffalo in a hollow, and stopped there for supper.

Through the late summer and early fall the young wolves hunted with their parents. During the day they stayed up in the mountains and slept in sheltered places. Sometimes they were scattered miles apart. At nightfall they called to one another with piercing howls, till they finally gathered about the old father wolf. Then they all set out to hunt together.

Sometimes they moved single file, stepping in one another's tracks. They swam across the river and stole noiselessly through the woods.

The timid sheep were easiest to kill because they could not fight. When they found a calf or sick old buffalo one sprang at his head while the others attacked from behind and bit his hind-legs. If the wolves went too near a herd the old buffaloes tried to hook them. Once a cub started to catch a young elk, but he was chased away by the old mother elk. They butted at him with their heads and struck at him with their sharp hoofs, while he ran with his tail tucked under him.

Autumn was pleasant enough with its bright days and frosty nights. The busy little creatures of the woods were gathering in their winter stores. Buffaloes and deer were fat from their summer's feeding, and could not always run fast to get out of the way when chased by the wolves. Plump rabbits and prairie-hens were everywhere for the catching. Many a night the cruel wolves killed more than they could eat.

But soon winter came with its shortening days and gray storms lowering above the horizon. Snow fell, and icy winds blew across the frozen land. The deer and elk and antelope gathered in sheltered valleys. The

wolves wandered down from the mountains, and roamed far and wide, hunting for food.

So long as the fresh snow lay soft and powdery in the gullies they could not run fast enough to catch anything, but when the snow packed hard, and an icy crust formed over the drifts, their spreading feet did not sink in deeply. Then they could go out and hunt the elk and the deer, whose small hoofs cut through the crust at every bound.

The young wolves felt hungry all the time. Sometimes, when a blinding storm shut them into their den among the rocks, they went without eating day after day. The fine snow sifted down upon their glossy winter coats as they lay close together, snuggling their cold noses into one another's fur. Many a night they dreamed of eating, and snapped and swallowed greedily in their short, uneasy sleep. Once, in nosing about hungrily, the strongest little wolf happened to find a bone that he had hidden and forgotten weeks before. With a spring and a snarl he crunched it between his white teeth and gulped it down in a hurry.

One winter evening the four cubs, with their parents and five or six others, were following

a herd of buffaloes. On galloped the buffaloes over the frozen plain. Behind and around them the dark forms of the wolves seemed to rise from the bushes and follow noiselessly. There was not a sound of a snap or a snarl. Now on this side, now on that, now lost in the shadows, the wolves galloped tirelessly on and on.

Here and there two eyes gleamed in the dim circle of a head, or bared white teeth glittered for an instant. Then again lost in the dusk, without the patter of a footfall on the snow, they edged nearer and nearer. Finally there was a sound of snarling and yelping. The wolves were fighting together over a dead buffalo. They ate him, and then broke away over the plain at a full jump, howling as they went.

Winter was over at last. The wolves were thin and fiercer than ever. Their grim black lips were always ready to curl back over their teeth at the smell of food. They felt such a dreadful gnawing emptiness inside that they were frantic to eat anything. When they began to grow weaker and weaker from hunger the welcome spring brought them new life.

Now in the time of pleasant weather and the plentiful food it was no longer necessary for the pack of wolves to hunt together. They were strong enough to look out for themselves. So the wolves scattered to make their summer homes in the loneliest spots among the mountains.

The weeks passed by, and soon there was many a new family of woolly little cubs frisking about the rocky dens. The fathers and mothers watched them lovingly. The black lips seemed almost smiling and the fierce eyes grew soft. They were gentle and happy there together, though so cruel and hateful to all the world outside.

XII

THE PANTHER

"THE BEST HUNTER"

THE BEST HUNTER

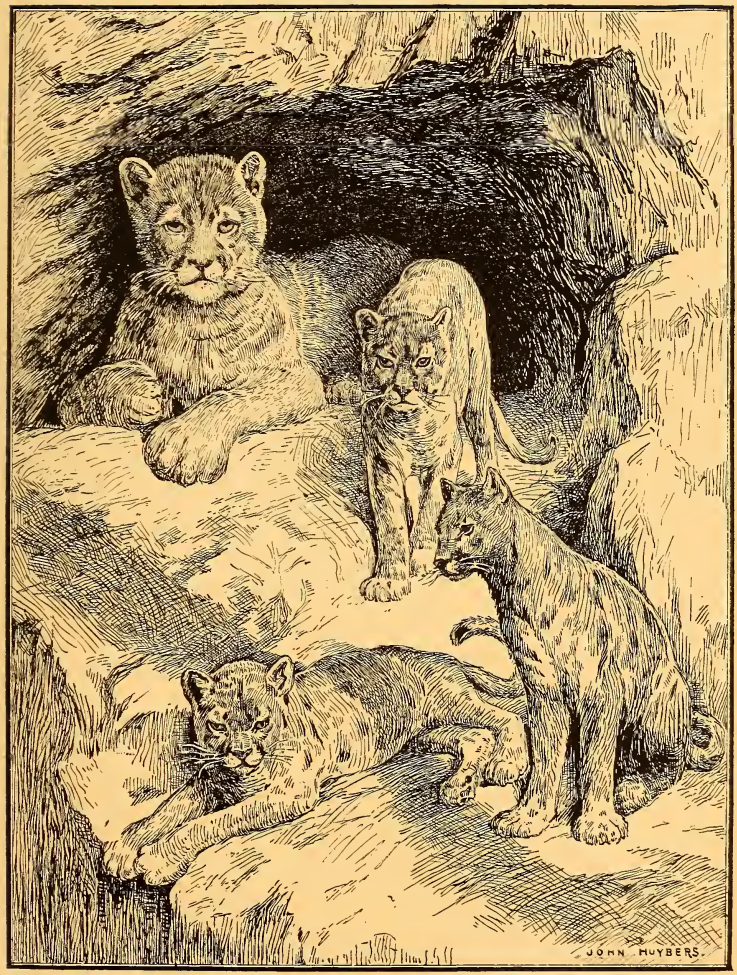
IT was so early in the morning that the stars were still shining in the dark purple sky. Far down between the rocky walls of the narrow canyon the brook rushed noisily on in the blackness. The chill breeze of dawn rustled among the evergreens. It ruffled the thick fur on the old mother panther's tawny body. With her great cat-like head held low, and her tufted tail switching from side to side, she was stealing silently home to her lair in the mountains. She had been out hunting all night.

At length she reached a spot where high above her head the dark mouth of a cave showed shadowy in the face of the cliff. She crouched for a spring, with all four feet gathered under her. There was a quiver of the wiry muscles, and the big yellow body went shooting up through the air to land on the ledge before the cave. She could leap farther than any other American four-foot.

For a moment she stood motionless, listening. From within the cave came the sound of whimpering. She heard three soft little bodies scrambling unsteadily about on the bed of sand and sticks and leaves. When she peered inside she saw three pairs of eyes glowing back in the dark like six red sparks.

As soon as the baby panthers saw her the whimpering changed to a hungry mewing. The old mother glided in and lay down beside them. Then the mewing softened to a low purring and died away into silence as the little ones nursed and fell asleep. Their satiny heads rested against the old one's big soft body, and their velvety paws were curled over their noses.

Outside the cave the morning brightened. The sun rose, sending level rays up the canyon to dance upon the foam of the brook. The blackness of the cave changed to twilight while the babies slept. Now and then one of them stretched out its furry legs and uncovered its sharp claws for a minute. They were not plain yellow, like the mother, but streaked and spotted with brown. They would not lose the brown spots for a year.



THE PANTHER.

"They were safe there, even when the mother was away hunting." *Page* 169.

For three months the panther babies stayed in the cave and lived on milk. They were safe there, even when the mother was away hunting. The ledge was so high above the floor of the canyon that no other animal could leap to it. The only danger was that some eagle might catch them if they crept too far from the mouth of the lair.

One morning the most careless little panther crawled away out on the ledge and was bending to look over at the brook. At that minute an eagle came rushing down with closed wings. His crooked talons were all ready to clutch the soft, furry sides. But the mother panther was coming home just in time. With a mighty spring from below she seized the baby by the neck in her great mouth and glided swiftly into the cave. His little head hung limply down, while his hind-legs toddled along behind. He could hear the flapping of the big wings outside.

Every day the little panthers played together like kittens. Sometimes they danced around with all four legs held stiff, as if made of wood. They scampered to and fro, chasing their own tails, turning summersaults,

and jumping high in the air over one another. They wrestled and slapped, for they could use their fore-paws almost like arms. They could toss up sticks and tear leaves to pieces. They could wash their faces, too, as easily as if they had hands.

In their wrestling they were careful not to hurt one another by letting their claws stick out of the soft, furry pads on their paws. There were five claws on each fore-foot and four on each hind-foot. They could draw these claws upward and backward between the little cushions on the soles of their feet. They always kept them drawn back when they walked, and that saved the sharp points from wearing dull on the ground.

At first the careless little panther forgot to draw his claws in while he was frisking with the others. More than once he caught them on the scattered sticks of the nest and went tumbling head over heels. One day he tried to climb up the wall of the cave. He dug his claws so deeply into a hole in the rock that he could not get them loose. He hung there mewing till his mother lifted him up by the neck so that he could twist his claws free.

As the babies grew older their teeth cut through their gums and they began to be hungry for meat. Their mother had wonderful teeth. Though she did not have so many teeth as the fox or the wolf they were even better suited for cutting and tearing. She could move her jaws only up and down, but not grinding around, as bears can. So, like the other flesh-eaters, she swallowed her food without chewing it.

One morning the big yellow mother came bounding up to the ledge with a partridge in her mouth. The three little ones heard her before they smelled her, for they could not smell so keenly as animals of the dog family. Waking up from their nap in the lair they appeared at the mouth of the cave. They were stretching and arching their backs and blinking in the light. The sunshine made the pupils of their eyes narrow smaller and smaller.

The minute they caught sight of the partridge they pricked up their ears and lashed their tails. With a bound they were on the bird, tearing its feathers with their claws. This was not the first time that they had

tasted meat. They pulled the bird to pieces with their long teeth. They ate the flesh and licked the bones with their rough tongues that were covered with backward-pointing prickles. Then they sat up and licked their chops and washed their paws and faces. They walked to and fro, purring comfortably, before lying down together for an after-dinner nap.

At last the baby panthers were big enough to go hunting with their mother. Each one carried his own weapons. These weapons were better than those of any other kind of animal. First were their terrible claws, packed away among the soft folds of skin on their feet. Then they had bristly tongues and long, cutting teeth behind their whiskered lips. They could bend and turn their fore-paws like arms, and strike dreadful blows, as if with a fist. They could see in the dark. They could hear the softest snap of a twig or rustle of a leaf. Their powerful muscles could send them bounding through the air upon their prey.

The young panthers must have been excited when they started out that first hunting night. The careless one could not help twitching his

tail. And he screamed once for fun, but not very loud. The smallest one was afraid to jump down from the ledge, for the ground seemed so far away. The two others crouched and sprang as they saw their mother do. They landed lightly on all fours with hardly a jar. When the third did not follow the old mother sprang back again and took him in her mouth. Whizz through the air, and there he was safe beside the brook. He stood quite still for a dizzy minute or two till the rocks stopped seeming to whirl around.

Down the shadowy canyon they followed the mother over the rocks and around thorny bushes. She hid them in a thicket while she went on to catch a deer. Her velvety paws made no sound, for the claws were drawn back and so did not click against anything, as the blunt nails of dog-like animals do.

The three babies lay still in the dark. They could hear the rushing of the brook and the whispering of the night wind among the pines. Now and then they pricked their ears at the patter of some small creature scampering through the brush. Once the far-away howl of a wolf floated up the canyon.

Presently they heard a new sound. It was the dragging of something heavy over the ground, knocking and scraping against stones and bushes. Soon the mother's voice called to them. They crept out from the thicket. There she was with a big deer hanging limp from her mouth. She had caught it by waiting on a rock by the brook till it came down to drink. Then she had sprung on its back and killed it.

The little panthers ate so much that they felt dull and drowsy. The mother covered what was left of the deer with leaves, and then lay down to sleep beside the young ones in the thicket. When they woke up they ate more before going home for the day.

Of course the babies did not learn much about hunting that time because they stayed so far behind. The next night the old panther let them go with her and watch to see how she did it. Sometimes she followed the trail of an animal and crept up from behind to spring. Sometimes she lay flat on a rock and waited till a deer or sheep or other prey was passing within reach of her spring. If it jumped away just in time to escape she fol-

lowed it only for a few tremendous bounds. She was too heavy and short of breath to be a good runner.

All summer the young panthers stayed with their mother. They hunted at twilight or at night or at dawn. Through the day they lay quiet in some thicket or cave among the rocks. They kept growing bigger and stronger. They exercised the muscles of their claws by scratching at the trees and the ground when they had nothing else to do.

They were playful creatures. Even the old mother frisked about the bushes and sprang out to pounce on a stone or a shadow. They pawed round stones over and over and pretended to chase them. They galloped to and fro; they rolled on the grass with their feet in the air, or they lay purring in the sunshine.

By autumn the young ones were strong enough to hunt large game alone. The careless little panther was noisier than the others. Many a night his wailing scream rang through the canyon as he prowled about the dark mountains. Then the breathless silence told how he was creeping stealthily along the trail of his prey. Over fallen trees and across

ragged ledges he crawled. Now he crossed a chasm on a log hanging in mid-air; now he crept along a tree-trunk down a steep cliff. Through swamps and thickets and over the rocks he patiently followed till he was near enough to spring upon the hunted animal and bear it to the ground with teeth and claws.

Though the panthers were not fully grown till they were two years old, yet they were strong enough now to kill any kind of animal except a grizzly bear or a big buffalo bull. They hunted big-horn sheep and white goats and all kinds of deer. Once in a while one of them caught a beaver in a mountain meadow, or pounced upon a rabbit in the brush. They ate rats and mice and raccoons and gophers. Sometimes even a nimble fox fell under a blow from their dreadful claws.

They were daintier than wolves, and would not touch stale meat or any that they happened to find already dead. They were not so cruel either, and never killed for the pleasure of killing, but only when they needed food.

When the days turned frosty in the mountains and the snow began to fall, the deer and

the sheep and the goats began to move down through the valleys in their search for fodder. Other animals, too, travelled toward the lowlands, where the winds did not blow so piercingly, and the cold was not so bitter. The panthers followed their game down upon the plains.

There they found a hiding-place among some evergreens in a dark gorge. Except when they were hungrily prowling for food they slept curled up, with their noses on their paws. They did not need much water to drink, and they hated to get their paws wet. They loved to be warm and dry and comfortable. The biggest of the cat family, such as the lions and tigers, belong to warm countries, but the strongest and fiercest of the dog family, such as the gray wolves, live in the northern lands.

One winter night the three young panthers and their mother were chased by a pack of wolves. There were many more wolves in the pack than the four panthers could fight. They were mad with hunger and could run much the faster. When the panthers saw the wolves galloping after them they bounded up among

the branches of a big tree. There they stood, with their hind-feet on one limb and their fore-feet on another, while they glared down at the leaping, howling pack. Perhaps then they learned how it felt to be hunted.

At daylight the pack skulked away to find easier game, and the panthers jumped down gladly, to rest their cramped legs. Those weeks just before spring were the hungriest of the year. Every creature in the wilderness must have been glad to see the spring. The panthers grew sleek and plump with the good hunting. They purred and arched their backs in the pleasant sunshine, and rubbed against their mother's side. The reckless young one rose on his hind-legs and dug his claws into the bark of a tree with a rip and a scratch. Then he stretched his yellow body lazily and screamed once, just for fun.

XIII

THE FUR SEAL

"THE ONE WITH THE FINEST FUR"

THE ONE WITH THE FINEST FUR

IT must have been the very noisiest nursery in all the world. The sloping beach of the island was dotted thickly with thousands and thousands of dark, furry seals. They were separated into families, each living on its own small square of sand and rocks.

Around every family a big father seal shuffled on his webbed flippers. Many of them were growling or barking angrily at the others. Some stretched out their long necks and hissed and whistled in a rage when any other old fellow dragged his big round body too near their homes. Some rushed together, snorting and roaring, for a fight.

The thick manes ruffled on their necks; the stiff whiskers bristled on their lips. Their big eyes snapped and flamed as they bit and tore at one another with their long, gleaming teeth. They rolled over and over, choking and banging and pounding.

All the while the graceful mother seals sat fanning themselves with their hind-flippers. They turned their pretty brown heads from side to side as they murmured and sang to one another. There were many more mother seals in the families near the water than in those higher up by the cliff. When they had come swimming up to the island a few days before they had been coaxed and driven to the different homes by the big father seals. The strongest fighters had won the best places close to the beach for their families. They were able to take care of more wives and babies than the weaker old fathers farther inland.

Now, in all that noise of murmuring and singing, whistling and growling, hissing and barking, snorting and roaring, and the crashing of breakers on the rocks, sounded the shrill ba-a ba-a-a of the new little baby seals.

They were pretty little creatures, with big blue eyes under long lashes. They had round, satiny heads and tiny pointed ears. As soon as they were strong enough to creep on their webbed flippers they toddled away together to find the sandy playground up on the island.

There they rolled and tumbled about like puppies on the clean, dry sand. When they were tired they curled up and went fast asleep, just where each one happened to be. When they woke up they began to play again in the cool gray fog, for it was almost always foggy on the island. And all the time, except when they were asleep, they kept up their noisy bleating, ba-a-a-a, ba-a-a-a, ba-a-a-a.

Back in the nurseries the mothers sat fanning themselves, or lay down for short naps on the beach. When they were hungry they shuffled down to the water and swam away to the feeding-grounds, a hundred miles through the sea. The old father seals, however, stayed in their places without eating or drinking almost all summer long.

Of course the thousands of babies away on the playground needed to be fed. About once in two or three days each mother came inland to nurse her little one. As soon as the hungry puppies saw an old seal coming up from the water they crowded bleating around her. Without noticing them she lifted her long neck and called for her own baby. When she heard his shrill little ba-a-a straight toward

him she shuffled. The other young ones in her path she knocked head over heels, right and left.

When she reached her own she curled down beside him and gave him plenty of rich warm milk. He drank and drank till he could hardly move for hours. He had to drink enough to last till his mother came again. It was never quiet there, with a dozen or more old seals always looking for their little ones among the wriggling, tumbling heaps of round, furry bodies.

When the babies were about a month old they learned how to swim. At first they only rolled and tumbled about the beach and played in sheltered pools. At the first splash of the water many a puppy screamed and scrambled out in a hurry. But the next day they tried it again, trotting up to the puddles and sliding in with a gasp and a shiver. They grunted and coughed and shook their heads as they paddled away with their short, triangular fore-flippers.

After their paddling they climbed out on the sand, and shaking the drops from their furry coats they lay down to take a nap.

THE FUR SEAL.

"At first they only rolled and tumbled about the beach." *Page* 184.

Then when they awoke in they tumbled to try it again. They learned to paddle with their fore-flippers, while they used their hind-flippers to guide them this way and that. After a week or two they could swim well enough to go into the sea itself with its foamy waves. Even the little ones, who had been so afraid at first that their mothers had to push them in and hold them up with their flippers, played in the sea all day long.

What fun it was! As soon as they awoke in the cool, foggy dawn away they raced for the beach. Now that they knew how to swim they could not walk on land so well as before. Instead of trotting on all fours, as they used to do, they began to shuffle like the old seals. They took a step with each fore-flipper, and then arching their backs they dragged up their hind-flippers at right angles to their round, tapering bodies.

But the swimming! That was worth all the walking it cost. In they splashed and went rolling and tumbling over and over in the curling foam. They could close their eyes and their noses, too, when a wave washed over

their heads. They whirled round in swift circles and chased the breakers inshore. They dived and paddled and raced, even when rain was spattering into the sea and the wind was driving spray against the cliff.

By the time the little seals were three months old the big fathers left their places and went down to the sea to wash and find food. They swam away through the white-capped waves to the feeding-grounds, and most of them did not come back again to the island that year. The mothers lay on the beach, sometimes dozing, and sometimes combing their sides and their backs with the nails on their fore-flippers. The babies had cut their teeth and were now learning to catch crabs to eat.

Very likely that was even more fun than playing in the sea. They swam quietly about in the shallow water near shore and watched till they saw a crab go scuttling over the sand below. Quick as a wink a little seal dived down and caught the crab, perhaps by one squirming leg. Up to the surface he paddled, and throwing back his head he gulped the crab down whole. Sometimes they ate shrimps, or tore juicy mussels from their

shells. They swallowed pebbles, too, to help their digestion.

Summer was now over and the days were growing colder. More than once the fog left frosty flakes on the seals' fur. The babies began to lose their jet-black color and look more like the old ones. Over a soft coat of silky brown fur there grew a covering of long, coarse hair, not quite so gray as that of the older seals. It is the rich under-coat that is used to make sealskin garments.

The old father seals had left the island first. Now it was November, and time for the mothers and little ones to swim away southward. There were thousands of other seals, who were the older brothers and sisters of the babies. All summer they had been living in the water near the shore or lying on the beach. They stayed there for a few weeks after the rest had gone.

The baby seals must have been sorry to leave the island, with its clean sand and sheltering rocks, its grass and moss and flowers. Perhaps they were a little afraid when they looked out over the wide sea. Once, while playing in the surf, they had seen a tall fin

drifting near. They had all raced for land in a terrified hurry. The fin belonged to a killer-whale, — an animal which was fond of eating seals.

Far out at sea the little ones could not scramble to land so easily in case a killer came swimming near. There were other enemies out there too. There were sharks, with rows and rows of jagged teeth, and sword-fishes, with long, sharp swords of bone sticking from their heads. There would be dreadful storms too, and probably many a seal would be drowned before it would be time to come back to the safe, happy island.

However winter was coming and they could not stay there much longer. So, gladly or not, away swam the little seals beside their mothers. Though they swam under water they needed to lift their heads above the surface to breathe every few minutes. When they slept they lay on their backs, with their noses above the water, and rocked in the swell of the sea.

When they were hungry they chased the fishes that swam near the top of the water. They could not dive deep enough to follow very far below. Around the islands and

lonely reefs they hunted for crabs amid swaying fringes of seaweed, and tore mussels from the slimy rocks. Many a goggle-eyed squid, with its long tentacles trailing through the water, was swallowed by the hungry seals. Once in a while an inquisitive sea-bird, who flew down to look at some dark nose at the top of the water, was caught and dragged under for dinner.

Sadly enough more than one killer-whale gobbled down a tender young seal, and many a shark came a-hunting. One day a swordfish chased a little fellow upon a floating cake of ice, and then tried to tip him off by pressing the cake down slanting into the water. Another time, in a dreadful winter storm, when the wind blew the waves into great foaming heaps, and the icy water chilled their tired limbs, some of the little seals sank wearily and were drowned.

But the others — thousands and thousands of fathers and mothers and babies and brothers and sisters — swam southward with the current till mid-winter. Then turning they worked their way slowly back to the foggy island in the northern sea.

First the old father seals arrived early in May. They all scrambled on shore and began to fight for the best places. A little later the young seals came swimming up to the familiar beach. There on the sandy slope they saw the fathers waiting, with their round bodies heaved up on their fore-flippers. They were stretching up their long necks with the thick manes falling over their shoulders. Each one was sitting alone in his space about ten feet square and watching with big round eyes for the herd of mother seals.

When the mothers reached the beach the fathers went down to meet them. Often, as soon as a big seal had gathered a few in his own nursery, some old fellow farther inland shuffled down and stole one of the mothers for his home. He could carry her in his mouth, for he was five or six times as big as the gentle creature. But when the other one caught sight of the robber, then what a snorting and growling and roaring as he came rushing back to the fight!

The young seals, who had been babies the summer before, this year stayed with their brothers and sisters in the water. They

were always frolicking together. They swam around in circles and dived and floated. They sprang out of the water in beautiful curves, with their backs arched, their fore-flippers folded against their sides, their hind-flippers extended and pressed together behind. Splash! into the water, and then out again in another flying leap.

Sometimes they crawled out on the beach and slept for a few uneasy minutes, their sensitive bodies twitching nervously. Sometimes they climbed up the cliffs behind the nurseries and looked down upon the crowded slope. There they saw the new little blue-eyed babies trotting up to the playground, and rolling and tumbling together all day long.

XIV

THE SHREW

"THE SMALLEST ONE"

THE SMALLEST ONE

THE little mother shrew was hurrying home to feed her babies. She was very tired from hunting for her supper under the hedge. She had run, just as fast as she could gallop, around and around a tree after a black spider. It had been a long chase to catch the lame grasshopper out in the grass. Even the stupid slugs had crawled from one leaf to another, till her pointed nose fairly ached from poking after them.

It was dark in the woods. The trees looked black, reaching up and up and up to the shadowy leaves far above. Here and there a star shone through, but the little shrew never looked up. She was busy finding her way in and out among the grasses and weeds. Now she jumped over a stick and scampered up a steep rock as high as a toadstool. Now she scurried around a tuft of ferns, ran along a dead log, and went springing from pebble to pebble across the tiniest brook. Once she

tripped over a leaf-stem and almost fell into a hole made by the hoof of a deer.

Every minute or two she sat up on her hind-legs and sniffed the air. Her bright eyes twinkled hither and thither to see if any enemy was near. If anything dreadful should happen to her, her seven little bits of babies at home would starve to death all alone.

At last, with a final scurry beneath a piece of torn bark she darted into her own front door, and she was safe at home. It was only a snug little hole under a stone close to a tree. There, cuddled together on a soft little nest, lay her seven pink babies.

Such mites of babies as they were! Even the very biggest one could have hidden in a thimble, with his sharp nose, specks of hands, snip of a tail, and all. When the little gray mother slipped in beside them seven pairs of eyes twinkled open like pin points. From seven tiny throats came baby squeaks as fine and faint as the crying of fairies.

Of course such little fellows did not need much milk to drink. A few warm drops were plenty for each one. Then they all fell

THE SHREW.

"Such mites of babies as they were." *Page* 196.

asleep again, with their soft, pink bodies nestled into the mother's silky fur.

The mother shrew herself was smaller than a mouse. To be sure she looked much like a mouse, except that her snout was longer and more pointed. When she opened her mouth, however, it was easy to see how different she was from any gnawing animal. Instead of chisel teeth, she had four long, cutting teeth in the front of her jaws and many-pointed teeth behind. She belonged to the *Order of Insect-Eaters.* She used her sharp teeth to seize worms and crush the hard wing-cases of insects.

As the spring days passed by velvety hair grew out on the babies' soft bodies. It was brownish black above and grayish white beneath. The hair grew on their tails also. Rows of bristling teeth began to peep out in their wide little mouths. They stopped drinking milk, and learned to eat the grubs and slugs which the mother brought home from her hunting.

Sad to say, the seven young shrews were quarrelsome little fellows. They pushed and crowded one another out of the nest. They

snapped and squealed and fought, rolling over and over. The stronger ones snatched the food from the weaker babies and bit and tore their fur. Not one of them seemed to care about anybody but himself.

Even the little mother became tired of watching over them and feeding them. She took them out into the woods a few times to show them how to hunt for their own food under the dead leaves on the ground. Finally, without even looking back or rubbing her nose in good-by, each one wandered away alone to find his own living.

The weakest baby roamed on and on, glad to get beyond the reach of his ill-tempered brothers and sisters. He dived into cracks under stones whenever he sniffed a strange smell. At every new sound he hid beneath brown leaves. He darted noiselessly in and out between the stems of bushes and stalks of grass. His tiny feet pattered so lightly that only the insects below could hear him spring over sticks and scamper across bits of bark.

At last he found a soft bank, where he dug his burrow. Although he belonged to the same order of mammals as the moles he did

not have large shovel-like hands for digging. His specks of paws could not scoop out much of a tunnel. All that he needed was a safe hole in which to sleep when he came home from his night's hunting.

Every evening at dusk, when the shadows lay dark under the trees, the little shrew peeped out from his burrow. Over him arched a leafy bush so thick that no hungry owl could spy him. A tangle of grasses hid the opening of his tunnel. In front of him a narrow path worn by his own dainty feet wound away through the dead leaves.

Off he scurried, looking like a bit of gray shadow, flitting from leaf to leaf and from root to root. Now he sat up on his hind-legs to sniff and listen and rub his whiskers; now he darted across an open space and vanished under a rotten log. It was hard for any other animal to catch a glimpse of him, for his fur seemed to be the same color as the dry sticks and leaves around him.

He had a lively time hunting for his supper. Here he pounced upon a sleepy spider under a leaf; there he overturned a clod to find a jelly-like slug beneath. At sight of a worm

writhing out of the ground he sprang upon it and jerked it from its hole. He caught a beetle that lay on its back kicking its feet in the air. His pointed teeth were kept busy crunching and crackling till he whisked away home to his burrow.

All through the early summer he found plenty to eat, but when the dry weather came most of the insects disappeared from among the withered leaves under the bushes. He often went hungry, though he hunted and hunted, peering under every bit of bark and mossy pebble. The worms crawled so far below the surface that only the strong-handed moles could follow them. Once he ate a young wood-mouse. Another time he leaped upon a frog, and did not let go his hold till it hopped into the pond.

As the little shrew stood looking down into the water he saw a water-shrew swimming in and out among the weeds. The air-bubbles on the tips of its fur glistened like silver. It was picking off shrimps from the under sides of the leaves.

The shrew on land was so hungry that he jumped into the pond and tried to swim too.

Probably he did not know that the water-shrew was different from him in having stiff hairs between its toes to help in paddling. He was all tired out before he caught even one shrimp. He was glad enough to creep out on the shore again, and rest under a dry root.

When autumn came the hunting was worse than ever. Worms squirmed deeper underground. Spiders hid away in safe nooks for the winter. Most of the insects were killed by the frost. The young shrew was hungry all the time and kept growing thinner and thinner. Once he found the body of another shrew which had starved to death. He dragged it into his burrow to eat. If he had been larger he might have chased the mice and chipmunks under the bushes.

Though he could not gnaw with his pointed teeth so as to dig out the insects beneath the bark of trees, he could tear rotten logs with his claws. Sometimes he came upon a torpid worm or grub curled up for its winter sleep in the soft wood. He learned to feed on beech-nuts and the tender tips of twigs.

After the snow fell the little shrew slept much of the time with his tiny paws pressed

into his fur to keep warm. When he woke up away he scampered over the snow, no matter how cold the weather was. It seemed as if he could bear any other kind of suffering more easily than hunger. Here and there were hillocks, which showed where a log or a stump was buried under the soft white stuff. The shrew burrowed down head first, in a hurry to find something to eat. Once in a while he picked up seeds which had been dropped by a squirrel or a blue jay.

At last the snow melted and warm rains fell. Worms poked their heads above ground and beetles staggered about in the grass. Spiders peered out of their holes. Ants came running out into the sunshine. The thin little shrew went hunting every night, darting hither and thither happily among the shadows of the woods.

XV

THE MOLE

"THE ONE THAT DIGS THE BEST"

THE ONE THAT DIGS THE BEST

DEEP down in their dark room underground the five mole babies lay fast asleep on a soft bed of leaves and grasses. The bed was not much bigger than a robin's nest. The little moles cuddled together, with their pointed pink snouts resting on one another's satiny bodies. Their little hind-feet sprawled behind them, and their big flat hands, with the pink palms turned outward, were spread close to their necks.

Presently the fattest little mole opened his black specks of eyes, though they were not of much use down there in the dark. He wriggled his pointed snout as he sniffed the air. The faintest of breezes floated toward him through one of the round openings in the wall. It was a breeze caused by something running toward the nursery. Tiny feet came galloping nearer and nearer. There was a light rustle of fur brushing along the tunnel. It was the mother mole hurrying back from her hunting.

All the little moles jumped wide awake in an instant when their sensitive bodies felt the quiver around them. It seemed to them that the earth shook under the mother's pattering feet. Of course they were not afraid, because they knew from the smell who was coming. And then, just as soon as they smelled the worm that she was carrying in her mouth, they began to tumble over one another to snatch at it.

The greedy young ones shoved and pushed and fought as if they were starving. They pulled at the worm with their claws, and snipped off bits with their sharp teeth. Even after it was all eaten they went nosing around in the dark and squeaked for more. The fattest little fellow crawled so far into one of the tunnels that he almost slipped into the tiny well which the parent moles had dug when they made this underground home.

The poor old mother lay down to rest for a few minutes. It seemed as if she did not have time to eat or sleep since the babies had cut their teeth and learned to eat worms. They were always hungry. As for herself,

THE MOLE.

"The greedy young ones shoved and pushed and fought as if they were starving." *Page* 206.

though the old father helped her hunt she was really growing thinner every day. The young moles were six weeks old now, and it was time that they learned to hunt for themselves.

The babies were eager enough to learn to dig and hunt. They were tired of staying in that dark nursery, even if it was so comfortable, with its domed roof and soft, dry bed. Perhaps they wished to poke their heads above ground just once and find out what the world was like. They did not know the difference between day and night yet, for where they lived it was always dark.

When at last the five young ones started out to learn to dig they followed the mother in single file along the main tunnel. This main tunnel was long and straight. Its walls were pressed smooth by the bodies of the old moles in their many journeys to and fro. Branching off in every direction from the main road there were side tracks zigzagging and curving hither and thither. These side tracks had been dug by the parents when they were chasing worms or hunting for grubs and beetles.

The babies scampered on to the end of the main tunnel. There the ground happened to be soft enough for their little claws. They crowded against one another, and squeaked and twitched their short tails impatiently. Their pink snouts were already bending and twisting in eagerness to be a-digging.

The fattest little fellow was in such a hurry to begin that he did not wait to be told. He nosed along the wall till he found a good place to start. Then planting his small hind-feet down flat, to brace himself, he set his tough snout against the dirt and pushed as hard as he could. At the same time he dug his claws into the wall and shovelled away with both his big broad hands.

There they went — the five babies — digging five little tunnels in five different directions. The dirt flew thick and fast as they shovelled it out and tossed it aside. But the specks of eyes were safely hidden under the fur, and the invisible ears and nostrils were kept closely covered too. When the dirt clung to their satiny gray fur they shook it off clean with a quick shrug of the skin. The hairs of the fur grew straight out, and

so it made no difference whether it was rubbed one way or another. It was never bristly or rough.

It must have been fun to go scrambling through earth almost as birds fly through air or fishes swim through water. The moles had such tough snouts and strong arms and powerful hands that they could burrow better than any of the other mammals.

One little mole burrowed on till his arms were so tired that he gave it up. He crept backward down his new tunnel to the spot where the old mother was waiting. Another kept on digging faster and faster till he ran his pink snout bump against a stone, and almost made it bleed. A third pushed on and on till he reached a patch of slimy mud that caved in over his back and sent his feet slipping and sprawling. The fourth dug till he came plump upon a fat white grub curled among some roots of grass. The little mole gave a jump and gobbled it down quick as a wink.

The fattest baby burrowed farther and farther till he felt the soil crumbling above him. Something warm was shining on his gray fur.

He lifted his head and poked his long snout up into the sunlight. He blinked his twinkling, tiny eyes and sniffed the strange fresh air. But he stayed there only for a minute, because he did not like it the least bit. The light dazzled him, and the warmth dried his cool, pink hands and made his head ache and his snout twitch uneasily. So after that one disagreeable minute he turned and kicked up his little hind-feet as he dived back into the moist, cool, dark, delightful places underground.

After this first lesson in digging the five young moles were running in and out of the nursery every few hours, night and day. It was easy enough to burrow away in search of the stupid white grubs or the beetles lying sleepy and still in the soil; but it was harder and much more exciting to hunt earthworms, because they always tried to wriggle off as fast as they could go.

Then how the dirt flew as the little hunter burrowed madly in pursuit! Now in this direction, now in that, he chased, pushing with his snout and tearing with his claws. Once in a while he stopped quiet to listen and feel

the ground for the faint quivering caused by the worm in its squirming hither and thither.

An hour or so of such lively work was enough to tire even a stout young mole. After eating what he had caught, sometimes he ran back to take a nap on the soft bed in the nursery. Sometimes he lay down in the main tunnel to rest; but that was not so pleasant, for it seemed as if one or another of his brothers and sisters was forever trying to scramble over him.

The busiest time for hunting was at night, or in the early morning, because then the worms began to move about after lying quiet all day. In dry weather the worms went deeper into the ground to find moisture. In wet weather they wriggled toward the surface, swallowing bits of dirt as they went. The little moles liked rain best because it was much easier to push through the light soil above than to tunnel through the hard ground below.

After the young ones learned to hunt for their own food it was not long before they had found and eaten every worm and grub

and beetle anywhere near. The old and new tunnels ran in every direction, curving, zigzagging, and criss-crossing through the ground. There was hardly a spot of solid earth under all the grass in that meadow.

Now and then on cool nights the whole hungry family crept outside and prowled about, looking for lizards, snails, or frogs. Once in a while one of them found a dead bird or mouse or small snake. He sprang on it and tore it to pieces in an instant. The moles always ate as if they were starving. Drawing back their heads and hunching their backs they stuffed the food into their mouths with their clawed hands.

As summer passed on the young moles began to grow discontented. They were tired of staying at home. They were too big to crowd upon the nest in the nursery. Whenever two met in any of the narrow tunnels one had to back into a side track to let the other pass. The water was stagnant in the wells. Food was getting more and more scarce. Many a time there was a sound of scratching and fighting in the long dark halls of that underground home.

Soon each little mole began to think of having a home of his own, where there would be nobody else to crowd him, or quarrel with him, or snatch the best of everything to eat. So presently, one by one, they wandered away to find pleasanter places. One prowled into a garden, and tunnelled ridges all over the green lawn. One stumbled into a pond, but he did not drown, for he could swim with his webbed feet. He swam across to a small island and dug his house under a bank where he could catch plenty of frogs.

The three others strolled into a field that had been freshly ploughed. The soil was not wet nor hard nor stony, but just what they liked best. Each one chose a corner, and ran his main tunnel from end to end of the space to be used for his hunting-ground.

The five new homes were much like the old one. Each had a domed underground room with a nest of leaves and grasses in it, and several outlets to allow escape in case of danger. Each had one or more main tunnels, with smooth-pressed sides and many zigzag side tracks leading in all directions. Each one

had tiny wells of water, and little storerooms for the winter supply of earthworms.

When winter came, and the ground was frozen hard above, each little mole, alone by himself, dived down into his safe deep nest and stayed there till early spring softened the soil. Then, livelier than ever, he shovelled his way out to the surface to find a mate. Soon in every pleasant little home under the ground there was a new family of soft, round babies, with their specks of eyes deep hidden in their satiny gray fur.

XVI

THE BAT

"THE ONE WITH WINGS"

THE ONE WITH WINGS

VERY early in the spring the little brown bat was born far back in the cool darkness of an old cave. All about him hundreds of mother bats were hanging, heads downward, from the black roof. They clung by their hooked claws to the rocks and to one another as they hung there, still drowsy from their long winter's sleep.

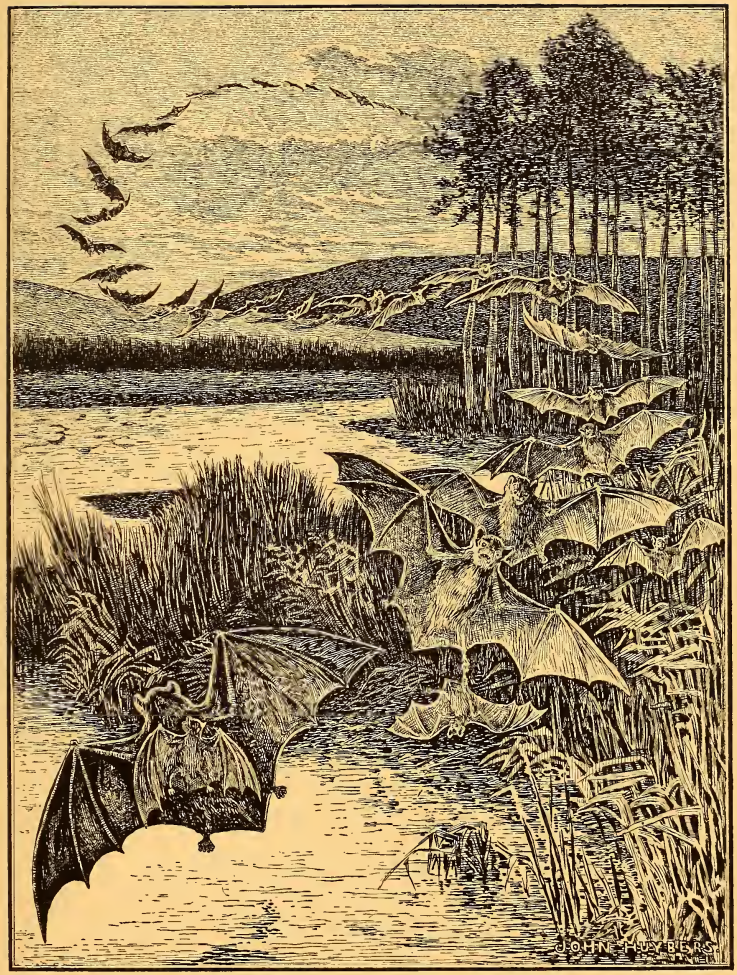
He was a tiny baby, — no bigger than a bean. His bits of eyes were tight shut, and his little skinny wings were folded close around his naked body. The mother bat looked like a furry mouse, though her tail was shorter, her ears were much larger, and her teeth were pointed instead of edged like chisels.

She had awakened enough to turn about and hang by her hooked thumbs instead of her feet. She held the baby in one of her wings while she nursed him. They were wonderful wings, made of thin skin stretched

over her long fingers, like cloth over the ribs of an umbrella. Her fingers were longer than all the rest of her body. The wings reached from her hands to her hind-legs and short tail. Sometimes the baby lay in the little cradle of skin that spread from her legs to her tail. Sometimes he swung in a fold of her wing.

There were many other babies in the cave. Each one was clinging to its mother with its strong little claws. The old bats had been hanging there asleep all winter long without eating or drinking. Their hearts beat very slowly, and their breath came faintly as they slept and slept, waiting for the spring to rouse them.

Day by day the frosty air outside grew warmer and came stealing gently into the shadowy place. The bats began to breathe more deeply. Here and there one stirred uneasily, raising drowsy eyelids, and fanning herself with one wing. Some squeaked softly as they twitched their long ears and sniffed with their crumpled noses. Presently they started to crawl up and down the walls. They shoved awkwardly against one another



THE BAT.

"His mother was flying so fast that it made him dizzy." *Page* 219.

as they dragged themselves along by hooking the claws of their feet into the rough rock.

More and more restless and wide awake the bats became as the weather changed to mild spring sunshine. They knew that now they could find insects to eat outside. So one after another let go her hold and dropped into the air. Then turning a summersault to get her head up she went flapping away to the mouth of the cave.

The baby's mother flapped out after the others, while the little one clung head downward to her fur. His eyes were open by this time and the silky fur was growing on his tiny body. His needle-like teeth were pushing through his gums, and his wings were getting stronger every day.

It was just at dusk when the young bat felt himself sailing out of the cave. If it had been bright daylight he could not have seen anything at all, for his eyes were made to use in the dark. To be sure, even now he could not see much, because his mother was flying so fast that it made him dizzy.

Her broad wings went flap, flap, flap above him while he clenched his claws more tightly

into her fur. His tiny head swung to and fro below as the old bat darted this way and that. Every minute or so the baby heard her lips suck something into her mouth and her jaws snap shut. Then came the crackling of a brittle shell as her pointed teeth crunched and crunched. He could feel her swallow once or twice and go darting away after another insect.

Long before daylight the bats flew back to the cave and hung themselves up, heads downward, to sleep through the day. After sunset they flitted out again to hunt for their supper, — or breakfast, it might be called. Of course all the young ones went with their mothers everywhere.

One evening, while the baby's mother was flying along as high as the tree-tops, she stopped so suddenly that the little fellow lost his hold. When he felt himself falling down through the air he flung out his wings. Almost before he knew it he had flapped his head up and was flying all by himself.

His knees were hinged behind and bent forward at the same time with his elbows. His tail could be used like a rudder. When he

gave it a whisk toward one side it sent him darting away toward the other. He learned how to climb up, up, up so lightly, and then sink downward with wings held motionless. It was such fun that the baby could not keep silent. Opening his wide mouth he uttered tiny squeaks and screams of joy as he flitted hither and thither.

Soon after this first lesson in flying he learned to catch and eat all sorts of insects. Every evening, at sunset, when the light began to grow dim at the mouth of the cave, the young bat followed his mother out into the cool, sweet dusk. He flew close behind her while she led the way to the pond. There they skimmed along, just above the water. Sometimes they dipped down for a sip as they went darting to and fro after the dancing gnats and mosquitoes.

At first very likely the little fellow did not catch all he needed, for he was not yet able to turn quickly enough when they slipped out of his path. Often and often, at sight of a swarm rising and falling in a glistening cloud just before him, he made a dive with his mouth wide open, only to find that they had

scattered like magic. There he was left hungry, with not even one of their glittering wings to tickle his tongue.

Moths were easier game, as they fluttered over the night-blooming flowers. He could see their bright wings from a long way off. Many a chase they led him, darting through the trees and wheeling about the bushes. Once in a while he found a sleepy butterfly among the dewy leaves, or a cricket chirping in the warm dusk of the summer fields.

It was hard to hunt insects on the ground, because the young bat could walk only by dragging himself along with his hooked thumbs, while his folded wings stuck up like the hind-legs of a grasshopper. When he did happen to catch something crawling on the grass he spread his wings over it to keep it from getting away; then he thrust his head down beneath and snapped it up. He drew food into his mouth by a succession of eager bites and sucks. Sometimes it took him several minutes to eat one large fly.

For a time the baby was afraid of beetles, because the first one that he caught gave him a nip with its sharp pincers. It was a big

green beetle with a hard shell. The little bat was trying to shear its wings as he had seen his mother clip off the wings of moths and flies. When he felt the stinging nip he dropped the beetle and flew squeaking to his mother.

He was not so much afraid of the red June-bugs in the early summer. Many a one he caught kicking on its back in the grass. Dozens of them he chased as they plunged humming through the soft darkness when the fire-flies were sparkling here and there. One night he flew so far in his hunting that he lost sight of his mother. Then he knew that he was lost. He flitted to and fro in the woods calling for her.

A big gray owl heard him and came whirring softly through the shadows. But the little bat felt it coming and slipped away among the trees. In and out between the leaves and branches he threaded his way, without bumping against the slenderest twig or scraping his wings over the smallest bud. Even with his eyes shut he could fly without knocking into anything. All the sensitive skin on his body and wings seemed to feel, without

touching, if so much as a spider's web swung across his path.

Daylight dawned while he was still flitting noiselessly through the strange woods. The first sunbeams dazzled his eyes, and the warm air made him feel feverish and uncomfortable. Finally he crept beneath the shadiest bush he could find and hung himself up by his hooked feet under a broad leaf. There he stayed quietly all day, only stirring uneasily and hitching farther into the shade when a sunbeam slanted through the leaves around him.

At last the sun went down and the cool dusk gathered in the woods. The lost baby bat opened his little eyes in the darkness that he loved so well. Almost all animals that sleep through the day have large eyes by which they see at night. Bats, however, have such sensitive skin to feel their way about that they do not need very keen sight.

Somehow, after flying for a long time, the young bat found his way home to the old cave. The other babies had not even missed him. They were squeaking and fluttering together. Some were playing on the ground,

pretending to bite at one another as they dragged themselves to and fro in their queer hopping run. Some were washing their faces and combing their hair after their suppers. The bat who had been lost was almost too happy to eat. He flew to his corner and fell fast asleep, wrapped in his own skinny wings beside his mother.

So the summer passed away. As the days grew colder in the autumn there were fewer insects to catch. Though the nights were longer the bats did not hunt so many hours as before. They were sleek and fat from the good eating all through the warm weather. Now they hardly felt hungry at any time. They seemed to grow sleepier and sleepier.

When winter had really come, and the frost had nipped the last insect from the air, the bats flitted into the cave to stay. They hung themselves up close together, clinging to the rocky roof or to one another. They wrapped their skinny wings around their plump, furry bodies and went fast asleep. Their little hearts began to beat more and more faintly. The blood ran more slowly in their veins, and their skin grew cooler in the cold air far within

that dark place. There they rested, sleeping peacefully, till spring came to wake them with its warm breezes and hum of many insects in the sunshine outside. When the twilight gathered still and dusky, out flew the furry bats and darted hither and thither with a soft flap-flap-flap of their wonderful wings.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

COUNTLESS years have passed since that day, long, long ago, when the first tiny living creature began to grow in the new world of rocks and water. All this time things have been moving and changing. The earth keeps whizzing around the sun, while the sun itself rushes blazing through space. Brooks are rippling; rivers are flowing; seas are rolling their waves against the shores. Now the trees toss their branches in the wind; now the rain sprinkles down from gray clouds, or snow drifts silently over the prairie.

In the spring all the wilderness is green with growing leaves and flowers and grasses. The world is alive with animals. In the water sea creatures are feeding in their places, or floating and swimming here and there. On land there are worms and insects, creeping reptiles and flying birds.

From inland ponds beavers scramble ashore in the dusk to nibble fresh twigs for supper.

In southern rivers the manatee crawls over the white sand among the reeds. On island beaches little seals go paddling in safe pools. Out at sea great whales glide through the waves.

On the plains buffalo calves kick up their heels near the grazing herd. Elk, with ears twitching at every strange sound, wander down from upland meadows. In the woods rabbits hop away under the bushes. Little shrews dart from leaf to leaf among the shadows. In wilder spots pointed noses sniff and bright eyes twinkle from the dens of wolves and foxes. Bears shuffle softly through the underbrush, and panthers steal out on tip-toe to their hunting.

In the trees squirrels scamper from branch to branch. Now and then a mother opossum trots by with her pocket full of young ones. Bats fly this way and that in hungry pursuit of insects dancing in the twilight air. Under the ground moles dig busily after worms, which go squirming hither and thither.

All these mammals, and many others more or less like them, live wild in the United States of America. They belong to the eight

orders named in the introductory chapter. In foreign countries there are still more animals which are members of these same orders. For example, the kangaroo in far-off Australia has a pocket like the opossum's, and belongs to the *Order of Pouched Mammals.* The elephant and the giraffe have hoofs and stomachs similar in the main to those of the buffalo and deer. Lions and tigers are cousins of the panther, and form part of the cat family in the *Order of Flesh-Eaters.* There are many other kinds of Gnawers, Insect-Eaters, and the rest.

Besides the mammals so closely related to native American four-foots there are also a number of others remarkably different from any of ours. These strange mammals belong to three orders. One is the *Order of Egg-Laying Mammals;* another is the *Order of Toothless Mammals;* and the last is the *Order of Four-Handed Mammals,* or monkeys.

The egg-laying mammals are regarded as the lowest of the eleven orders because they resemble birds and reptiles in laying eggs. The Australian duck-bill belongs to this

group. The duckbill is a furry creature with a long flat bill on its face. It has nostrils at the end of this bill. It has webbed feet, like a duck, and lives mostly in the water. The baby duck-bills are fed on milk when they hatch out of the eggs.

The *Order of Toothless Mammals* comes low down in the scale, — after the egg-laying and the pouch-wearing mammals. None of the animals in this order have teeth in the front of their jaws, though some have teeth in the back. Some are covered with hair and live in trees; some have an armor of large scales and burrow in the ground; some have long snouts, through which they thrust their tongues to lick up ants from the gravel. These so-called toothless mammals are slow and clumsy and stupid.

The *Order of Four-Handed Mammals* is the highest of all because the animals in it are much more like men than are any of the others. A monkey's bones are almost exactly like those of a human being. He has hands very like a man's. His face is more human than that of lower animals. He has sharp sight, and looks at things instead of smelling,

as dogs do. He can mimic men, and learn to act like them in many ways.

The monkey was the latest kind of animal that appeared on the earth before man came. Think of the difference between the first tiny creature, like a bit of transparent jelly, and the hairy monkey, with his wonderful body and brain! The first living thing could take in food from the water, and grow, and divide into halves. The monkey has a nose for smelling, a mouth for tasting, hands for touching, ears for hearing, and eyes for seeing. He can remember and think and talk in monkey language. He can use tools, as men do.

The power of men to plan and use tools makes them stronger than all other animals, great or small. If a man wants a pocket he can sew it in his clothes. Though he cannot swim so well as a manatee or a whale or a seal, he can build boats and travel through the water in that way. Instead of cutting trees with his teeth, like the beaver, he chops with an axe. He cracks nuts with a hammer instead of nibbling like a squirrel. Though he cannot endure such cold as does the hardy

buffalo, yet he knows how to make fires and keep warm in houses. He invents steam-cars that carry him more swiftly than the fleetest deer. With his gun and his sword he is a far more terrible fighter than the sharp-clawed panther or the long-toothed wolf. He can fly through the air in balloons, though he has no wings like a bat. Even with his slender hands he can dig better than a mole, for he knows how to use shovels and steam-drills. Most wonderful of all, instead of merely chattering like a monkey he can send messages on wires around the world.

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